A Forest for a Thousand Years:
Cultivating Life and Disciplining Death at Daihonzan Sōjiji, a Japanese Sōtō Zen Temple

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (Anthropology) in The University of Michigan 2011

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For Ita

Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te.

Acknowledgements

No work of ethnography can be accomplished without the help of a great many people who were generous of their time, patience, and trust. However, the need to protect the identities and privacy of my informants must trump all feelings of gratitude and indebtedness that I might feel. As is convention in ethnography, all individuals named in this work are pseudonyms; and all individually identifying information has been altered.

Since I cannot thank individuals by name, I can only express a deep and lasting appreciation for the generosity and patience of both the clerical and lay communities of Daihonzan Sōjiji. In particular, my thanks go to the members of Sōjiji's Baikakō and Nichiyō Sanzenkai who welcomed me into their number with friendship and a willingness to tolerate my never-ending series of questions.

I am indebted to the entire clerical community at Sōjiji for their understanding, patience and willingness to help me see and understand the inner workings of a large Sōtō Zen monastery. I am especially grateful to those priests and unsui who candidly shared with me their experiences and memories of Sōjiji.

All of this would have been impossible without the introduction of the late Saitō Shingi, who facilitated my initial entrée into the Sōjiji community. I was terribly saddened to hear of his passing, and will be forever thankful for the kindnesses he showed me.

My field research from 2006 through 2008 was conducted under the auspices of a Fulbright Graduate Research Fellowship, endowed by the Mitsubishi Corporation. I am grateful to David Satterwhite and Jinko Brinkman of the Japan-U.S. Educational Commission for their priceless support and assistance throughout my fieldwork in Japan.

I am thankful to all of my Japanese language instructors at the University of Michigan, the FALCON Program at Cornell University, Middlebury College's Summer Language Institute, and the Inter-University Center for Japanese Language Studies. I wish to especially thank Kōno Tamaki from the IUC for her infinite patience and continuing support in helping to deepen my understanding of Japanese language and culture.

Samuel Meyrowitz and Joseph Joffe provided steady reminders that there is life outside of graduate school and a world beyond the dissertation. David Offenbach-Abbott was instrumental in preserving my sanity and helping me keep perspective at times when I seemed to be lacking in either.

Thank you to Satō Seiko, Yamamoto Shin'ichi, Erik Schicketanz, and Jolyon Thomas for giving me encouragement, support and friendship throughout my time in Japan.

The Anthropology Department at the University of Colorado Denver provided a safe haven (and office space) to facilitate my transition from graduate student to professional scholar. I am particularly grateful to Steve Koester, David Tracer, Charles Musiba, Sarah Horton and Julien Riel-Salvatore for their guidance, encouragement, and friendship throughout the writing process.

Getting through graduate school is in many ways a team effort, and I was fortunate to find a wonderful cohort of friends and colleagues at the University of Michigan. Thank you to John Thiels, Karen Smid, Cat Bolten, Ann-Elise Lewallen, Chris Ames, and Eva-Marie Dubuisson for always being there for me when I needed them to be. Of special note is Laurie Marx who has been a peerless navigator of the dangerous seas of institutional bureaucracy throughout my entire graduate career.

This research took me far from my home and family, but I am grateful to Dad and Pam, Mom and Gregg, Cody and Alyssa for never being too far away, and for being always willing to meet me more than halfway.

My love and gratitude go to Akiyama Taka'aki, Chiyōko, Kentarō, Nobuyuki and Ichi for making me and my wife a part of their family.

Since my very first trip to Japan in the summer of 2001, Shimazono Susumu at the University of Tokyo has been a source of wisdom, guidance, and support for my research. I am extremely fortunate to count myself among the family of scholars of religion in whose careers Shimazono-sensei has played a vital and defining role.

Gillian Feeley-Harnik, Erik Mueggler, and Micah Auerback challenged me when I needed to be challenged, encouraged me when I needed encouragement, and inspired me when I needed inspiration. I am very fortunate to have had worked with such a stellar dissertation committee.

My humblest gratitude goes to my advisor and mentor, Jennifer Robertson, for taking a chance on a brash and overconfident graduate student who knew close to nothing about Japan. It is due to her painstaking cultivation, her tireless advocacy, and unwavering confidence in my abilities that I was able to become the scholar I am today.

Lastly, to my beloved wife, Ita, belongs the true triumph of this dissertation. At every step of the way, she has been the strength behind my efforts and the inspiration behind my words. I hope only that this work is worthy of her, and deserving of the years love and support she so selflessly gave to me in order to bring this project to fruition.

To all of the people named above and to all those who cannot be named, my gratitude is boundless. The responsibility for any mistakes, omissions, or inaccuracies in this work is borne solely on my shoulders.

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Honzan

"People Tilling Upon the Dharma Hall"

Japanese summers are known for their intense heat and oppressive humidity, and today is no different. As I walk through the streets of Tsurumi towards Sōjiji, I take every opportunity to hide in the shade of storefront awnings, but it does little good. The heat is inescapable, and there is virtually no breeze to provide relief. I will be participating in a ceremony in the Daisodō today, and I am wearing a respectable long-sleeved shirt and slacks. Making matters worse is my over-the-shoulder bag, heavy with notebooks, a camera and my recording gear. In the twenty minutes it takes to cover the mile or so from my front door, through the busy streets of Tsurumi, and to the entrance of Sōjiji's reception hall, my face and shirt are drenched with sweat. I begin to regret my decision not to take a taxi.

At first glance, Tsurumi is an unlikely place to find a venerable Zen temple. The municipal ward of Tsurumi sits in the northeastern corner of Yokohama, immediately adjacent to the industrial city of Kawasaki to the north and Tokyo Bay to the east. Tsurumi is a testament to the rapid industrialization of Japan throughout the twentieth century, a landscape of concrete and metal dotted with pockets of greenery that are more

the product of urban planning than nature. As a place name, Tsurumi means "to see cranes," after the rare and majestic birds which used to frequent the shores of the village. Today, however, the only cranes visible are the massive metal monoliths that service the factories and warehouses situated along the coastline of Tokyo Bay, itself recreated to fit the needs of industry.

The town's location between Tokyo and central Yokohama places the town along the main rail artery and roadways which links the two metropolises. For twenty hours a day, trains thunder along the railway that runs through Japan Railways' (JR) Tsurumi station, the commercial center of the town. One either side of the station, wide avenues allow for high volumes of motor traffic throughout the day. At major intersections, the chirping of pedestrian crossing signals is a constant accent to the hum of automated traffic. At railway crossings, such as the one in front of Sōjiji, the sound is amplified nearly ten-fold by bells warning pedestrians and drivers of the oncoming rail traffic. Trains run almost constantly through the Tsurumi artery and as a consequence, the crossings bells ring for nine minutes out of every ten.

Visitors with experience of other large Japanese Buddhists temples are quick to note that the area surrounding Sōjiji proper differs greatly from other temple approaches (*sandō*). In contrast to temples like Asakusa Kannon-dō and Kawasaki Daishi, the storefronts and booths hawking food or tourist goods are nowhere to be found, nor are the crowds of tourists that push along the sidewalk. A five-story department store sits on one side of the rotary used as a bus terminus and taxi stand, while restaurants, convenience stores, a pharmacy and a McDonalds line the road toward the temple proper. Closer to the temple, the approach to Sōjiji would be indistinguishable from any other commercial

street in Tsurumi save for the quiet but visible presence of florist shops, stores selling stone monuments, and immediately across from the temple entrance, the branch office of a funeral company.

Neither the temple precincts nor architecture are visible from the street. Instead, the entrance to Sōjiji is marked by a covered wooden announcement board, two large stone lanterns, and tall sign which reads "*Sōtōshū Daihonzan Sōjiji*". A paved pathway leads through the stone lanterns, and up a gentle incline lined by tall, broadleaf evergreen trees. With the buildings of Tsurumi University visible through the trees on either side of the path, one might be forgiven for mistaking the path as part of the college campus. Indeed, students and teachers regularly cross across the pathway to get from one side of campus to the other.

As the visitor climbs the hill, the stone pathway curves slightly, eventually hiding the busy street below. About a hundred meters up the path stands the weathered wooden gate known as the Sanshōkan. The Sanshōkan is never closed, nor does it connect to any walls that might serve to keep people out of the temple. Instead, the gate's purpose is to be a symbolic barrier between the temple precincts and the outside world. Still, crossing the threshold of the Sanshōkan, a visitor notices that the sounds of the city – the cars, the trains, the incessant ringing of the railway crossing bell – have fallen away. The sudden quiet is dramatic.

The pathway continues its steady incline towards the imposing two-story Sanmon which sits at the top of the hill. Climbing the stairs and passing through the gate, visitors must pass under the threatening gaze of the larger-than-life guardian statues known as the Two Kings (*Ni-Ō*). Emerging into Sōjiji's precincts proper, signs guide visitors away

from the manicured lawn to the right, up another incline, and into the temple's main reception hall.

It is still a week before the traditional start of the three-day celebration of Obon, but already the temple is a flurry of activity. On my way through the temple buildings, I pass teams of monks on their way to the homes of Sōjiji parishioner families who have requested their services to chant in front of the household altar known as the *butsudan*. During the three days of the holiday itself, the demand for this service is so great that there is nothing but a skeleton crew of monks remaining at Sōjiji to continue basic operations.

While parishioner families throughout Yokohama and Tokyo wait for the monks to arrive at their homes, other parishioners are arriving in a steady stream at the temple for grave visitation. The Obon festival is the largest of several occasions throughout the year when the Japanese customarily pay their respects to their ancestors at the family grave. At Sōjiji, as at many Buddhist temples in Japan, the Sejiki ceremony is an essential part of the Obon celebration and an opportunity for families to generate merit for the salvation of their loved ones by sponsoring the reading of sutra and the feeding of hungry spirits. To accommodate the massive rush of parishioners who will be coming to Sōjiji for grave visitation, as well as ensure that there are enough unsui on hand to properly perform the ceremony, Sōjiji holds a Sejiki ceremony once a day for ten days before the official start of Obon.

Today, the Honzan Baikakō has been invited to perform several *goeika* songs at the ceremony. I find the Baikakō getting ready in our rehearsal room, casually chatting with one another around cups of hot tea. The women are wearing long skirts and blouses,

over which they will put on their blue polyester choir-robes. The men are spared the choir robes but wear long-sleeved shirts, blazers and a tie. I balk at the thought of wearing any more layers in this heat, but everyone else seems to have accepted the discomfort of the heat for the sake of proper decorum.

After several minutes, an usher monk comes to fetch us. He leads us, bells and songbooks in hand, to the Daisodō – Sōjiji's enormous ceremony hall, also known as the Dharma Hall. Most of the members of the Baikakō have done this walk hundreds of times, but still we walk slowly behind the monk as if he is guiding us for the first time through the drafty corridors of the Shiuntai, the old wood, darkened by a century of twice-daily cleaning, creaking with each step.

We enter the Daisodō one by one and bow with our hands pressed together as we walk up the ramp to the inner hall. In the rear of the room, the black lacquered altar – where the action of the ceremony will take place – has been set up with its back facing the entrance of the hall. On both the right and left sides of the room, rows of red felt carpeting have been laid out on the tatami floor to create semi-cushioned seating areas for the parishioners who have already begun filling the room.

The Baikakō is led to the rear of the carpeted seating area on the eastern side of the hall, a position of honor. It is from our seats on the floor here that we will be singing *goeika* prior to the start of the ceremony. After a few moments of careful negotiation concerning who will sit where, we finally take our seats and open the bundles containing our bells and songbooks, arranging them just so on the floor in front of us.

As we do this, the ladies of the Women's Group, the Fujinkai, enter the hall, escorted by their own usher. Like the women of the Baikakō, the Fujinkai are similarly

wearing their finest: most wear skirts and blouses, though a handful of the women are wearing beautifully brocaded kimono in purples, greens and pinks. The greetings that both groups extend to the other – less than a bow, but more than a head-nod – are cordial and perfunctory, similar to the obligatory acknowledgement that two strangers give to one another in an elevator. There is much unspoken in this greeting: an acknowledgement of presence, to be certain, but also an unmistakable air from both sides that broadcasts the message, "you're in my space." The Fujinkai takes their seats next to us, but as far as interaction with the Baikakō is concerned, they may as well be sitting in a different room.

The parishioners begin streaming into the hall in earnest now, taking their seats wherever they can find them on the red carpeted sections of the inner hall. They are directed by a handful of monks who are doing their best to shout over the din and direct traffic using their hands and arms as signposts. These ushers encourage everyone to sit as close together as possible to maximize the available seating room, but most of the parishioners are content to cluster themselves as islands of families or individuals. There are few greetings shared between the parishioner families, no more than there would be at a movie theater or on a crowded bus.

At this point in my research, I had grown accustomed to being able to recognize temple parishioners by their funereal attire and solemn demeanor. If I passed a group walking in mourning clothes in the temple corridors, I could be reasonably sure that they were parishioners of Sōjiji who had come for a funeral or memorial service. Today, however, people in mourning clothes were few and far between. Instead, I was surprised to see that many among the parishioners – especially the younger participants, of which there were a surprising number – were wearing jeans, skirts and even t-shirts and shorts.

Rather than wearing their best, as the Baikakō and Fujinkai had done, it seemed as if the parishioners were dressed as if they were on their way to a picnic in a park or a day at the mall.

At the southern end of the hall, the bays of the Daisodō facing the garden are open to let both the public and the cross-breeze enter. As always, there are about forty chairs arranged on the linoleum floor of the public area at the rear of the hall. Unlike most days, today these chairs are mostly filled. Some of the visitors are there to escape the oppressive mid-day heat in the relative coolness of the hall; others were drawn in by curiosity at hearing the sound of the assembly bell as they walked through the garden. Those with their hands full with bouquets of flowers and small gardening tools are clearly on their way to the cemetery, and have stopped off to throw money into the coffer and offer incense; others who brandish backpacks and cameras are tourists trying to capture the sheer size of the hall to show family and friends back home. Still others are locals wearing track suits and sneakers, for whom Sōjiji is just one stop on their daily constitutional walk.

The majority of these visitors will only be in the hall for less than five minutes, and so the forty chairs will see a lot of turnover in the span of the ceremony. It is just as well: because the altar for this ceremony is oriented with its back toward the outside of the hall, the people seated in the area open to the public are essentially backstage, and unable to see any of the activity that is going on at the altar. Very few care to stick it out for the duration of a ceremony they will only be able to hear, not see, and almost certainly not understand.

By now, fifty black-robed monks have responded to the assembly bell and are kneeling in the south-west corner of the hall, carefully arranged in rows according to seniority. The senior clergy, wearing robes of browns or blues, enter one by one from the eastern entrance of the hall, and take their place next to the rows of novice monks. The assembly bell will tell the clergy when to rise and begin their procession into the room in two lines, with the novices following the senior priests.

As the Baikakō sings, I mentally note that there are no members from the Sunday Sanzenkai present today. I am not too surprised: I already know that the group will be asked to participate in the ceremony during their weekly meeting on Sunday. This news will come as a disappointment to some in the group who view participation in the ritual life of the temple as an unwelcome inconvenience to their zazen practice. Many of those members in the know will have had the foresight to take the day off.

As the Baikakō finishes its song, the assembly bell signals for the clergy to process into the hall. An attentive hush descends over the hall as the parishioners look to the ushers who will walk them through the ritual movements of the ceremony. The abbot, making an uncommon appearance to officiate the ceremony, enters the hall with a ten-person entourage, their arrival accented by the thunder of giant drums as he approaches. The ushers, who have spread themselves in front of the carpeted areas, simultaneously begin to give instructions to the assembled laity. Their voices are hard to hear over the reverberations of the drums and bell which fill the hall. Adding to the din is the repeated crash of loose change being thrown into the wooden slots of the coffer behind the altar.

As I look around the hall, I am struck by the non-uniformity of the assembled congregation. It would seem that every individual who is sitting in the Daisodō, walking

through the temple grounds or visiting their family grave in the cemetery has come to Sōjiji today not with any shared purpose, but for their own reasons and through their own relationship to the temple. At the same time, despite the sweltering heat, the outpouring of the laity today has imbued the temple with a feeling of renewed energy and purpose. This diverse community participating together – over five hundred people under one roof – is incontrovertible proof of the continued vitality of Daihonzan Sōjiji.

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At the end of his life, Sōjiji's visionary founder Keizan Jōkin (1268-1325) is imagined to have envisioned the scene described above. As his death approached, Keizan gathered his strength to compose a final verse (*yuige no kekku*), a poetic capstone to his life that would be recorded for posterity as his legacy:

Mizukara tagayashi, mizukara tsukuru kandenchi.	I cultivate and I shape this tranquil field.
Ikutabi ka urikori, kaisatsu arata nari.	So many times sold and bought, it is made anew.
Kagiri naki reimyō no tane, jukudatsu su.	Limitless generations of seeds will flourish and decay.
Hattōjō ni kuwa wo sasuhito wo miru.	I see people tilling upon the Dharma Hall.
(Momose 2002: 245)	

After writing these words, Keizan is said to have put down his brush and passed from this life.

At the time of Keizan's death in 1325, the small temple known as Shōgakusan Sōjiji was four years old, and was little more than a handful of wooden structures built upon the remains of an older devotional shrine. Sōjiji was situated near the sea in the north of the Noto Peninsula, then as today a poor and remote region. Still, within two

centuries of its founding, Sōjiji had transformed from a small rural chapel to a large temple complex befitting a major religious and administrative center.

It was through the innovative brilliance of Sōjiji's custodians and the accidents of history that the sect of Japanese Buddhism known as Sōtō Zen flourished throughout Japan for five hundred years. Sōjiji sat at the pinnacle of a network of over sixteen thousand loyal temples, its priests renowned for their ability to bring in support from every stratum of society. Sōjiji's cultural impact was equally immense: rituals and practices established by Sōjiji priests in the medieval period were instrumental in shaping Japanese cultural patterns that persist even today.

By the start of the modern period, however, Sōjiji was poised on the brink of ruin. Already weakened by political changes at the national and international levels that had taken much of its political and financial support, Sōjiji soon became embroiled in an internecine struggle for control of the Sōtō Zen sect. A fire in 1898 completely destroyed the temple, putting Sōjiji's future into doubt.

Sōjiji was built anew – some say reincarnated – in 1911 in Tsurumi, an otherwise unremarkable coastal village far from its historical roots. Situated between Tokyo and Yokohama, Tsurumi was undergoing a remarkable transformation from farming village to a center of industrial production for the rapidly modernizing nation. From its new position on a hill above Tokyo Bay, Sōjiji sat witness to a century of dramatic change in Japan: industrialization, militarization, devastation, occupation, prosperity, and depression. Through it all, Sōjiji has simultaneously been a stalwart bastion of Japanese tradition and Buddhist practice, and a fully modern institution that serves as a flagship for a religion whose international profile has expanded exponentially in the post-War era.

Today, Daihonzan Sōjiji is a large temple complex that is situated just 45 minutes by train from central Tokyo. Far from being a remote mountain retreat, Sōjiji is a vital part of the city that surrounds it. Covering more than three square kilometers of area above Tokyo Bay, Sōjiji is among the largest temples in Japan. According to conservative estimates, more than four hundred thousand people will visit Sōjiji over the course of an average year. Fully a quarter of this number – one hundred thousand people – will visit the temple within the first seven days of January alone for Hatsumōde, the traditional New Years custom of visiting a temple or shrine. The remaining three hundred thousand visitors will arrive in a more or less continuous stream over the course of the year, with visits spiking dramatically during holiday observances.

Sōjiji is recognized as one of two *honzan* – literally "main mountain," but more precisely translated as "head temple" – of the Sōtō Zen sect of Japanese Buddhism. The Sōtō Zen lineage and teachings – known within the sect as the True Dharma (*shōbō*) – are said to have been "brought" to Japan from China in 1227 by Dōgen Kigen, one of the most famous figures in Japanese religious history. Today, the Sōtō Zen sect is the largest of all the Japanese Zen sects, with official estimates placing the number of adherents at over eight million people.

As *honzan*, Sōjiji sits at the apex of an administrative pyramid under which a network of subordinate temples, known as *matsuji*, or "branch temples," is organized. Much like the Vatican, a *honzan* of a Japanese Buddhist sect serves as theological, political, financial and administrative flagship for a religious sect. The abbot of a *honzan* is usually the spiritual and nominal leader of the sect, tasked with maintaining the authority, legitimacy, practices and traditions of the religion. To be properly ordained as

a clergyman, a sect's priests must undergo a period of training at *honzan*, or at a recognized regional training temple which follow an approved clerical curriculum. That the Sōtō Zen sect has two officially recognized *honzan* distinguishes it from every other sect of Japanese Buddhism.

"What is a Zen temple?"

I initially approached my field research at Sōjiji with a simple question: what is a Zen temple? My intention was to let the subject – in this case, Sōjiji – speak for itself as much as possible: What does each building in the temple *do*? How does each building function in relation to the whole? As my research progressed, I hoped to be able to understand the role that a Zen temple, as a socially- and legally-defined entity, plays within Japanese society at large.

My first notebooks were filled with observations about the architecture and other distinctive features of Sōjiji's buildings, as well as the structural layout and directional orientation of the buildings in relation to one another. I spent days moving between different "posts" around the temple complex from where I could unobtrusively observe the steady flow of people moving through the pathways of the garden, the ordered lanes of the temple cemetery, and the hallways and interior of the temple buildings.

While Zen temples are architectural artifacts, they are very often depicted using imagery taken from nature. The most common is to call Zen temples "mountains," in reference to a mythologized practice of ancient Buddhist teachers who secluded themselves as hermits on difficult-to-reach mountain peaks. All Buddhist temples in

Japan have “mountain names” as a prefix to their temple names in reference to this practice, despite the fact that very few temples are actually located on mountains.

Another common natural image is to depict Zen monasteries as “forests” (*mori*) or “forested groves” (*sōrin*). While invoking the image of a quiet and secluded forest temple retreat far from civilization, the term has become a double entendre over the centuries. In this imagery, the “trees” are the participants in the daily life of the temple – the monastics, the parishioners, the visitors – who stand together, grow together, and support one another. A forest is defined by its multiplicity: one tree alone does not a forest make.

Similar to this forest imagery is to refer to Zen monasteries as “gardens” (*garan*), or specifically “Zen gardens” (*zen'en*). The garden imagery invokes the notion of cultivation – the growing plants must be regularly cared for, nurtured, and tended – but also of disciplining – everything in a garden has its proper place, and careful attention must be taken to keep the growing plants clear of unwanted weeds and debris.

Sōjiji was built in the style of a *shichidō garan*, or “seven hall garden.” This style of architecture was characteristic of Buddhist monasteries in China during the Song Dynasty (960-1276 CE), and became an essential feature of Japanese Sōtō Zen monasteries during Japan's medieval period. Depictions of the *shichidō garan* style added anatomical imagery, presenting it as a human body: at a temple's “heart” is a hall known as the *hondō* (“main hall”), in which the temple's principal image – often an image of the Buddha – is enshrined. The other six buildings of the *shichidō garan* have similar anatomical significance: the Dharma Hall (*hattō*) is considered the “head”, the Monk's Hall (*sōdō*) and the storehouse (*kuin*) are the “hands”; the toilet (*tōsu*) and the

bathhouse (*yokusu*) are the "feet"; and finally, the temple gate (*sanmon*) is the "genitalia."

In the *shichidō garan* temple layout, one could see layers upon layers of fractal symbolism at work: the message, encoded in the architecture, was that the perfectly ordered temple and the perfectly ordered body were one and the same. Further, the perfectly ordered temple was to be a model of the perfectly ordered universe: the central image of the temple sat on an altar known as a *shumidan*, a representation of Mt. Sumeru, the *axis mundi* of Buddhist cosmology. Within a temple's walls, all points of reference are determined by the orientation of the central image: regardless of true magnetic direction or geographical orientation, the direction the central image faces becomes "south", its left hand defines "east" and at its right hand lies "west." The establishment of a temple with an enshrined image literally has the power to remake the world.

According to the principles of *feng shui* (Jp. *fūsui*) that were imported to Japan alongside Chinese architectural concepts, nature is wild and capricious, but it is chaotic within an internal logic that keeps the world in a careful organic balance. Taken out of balance, nature could run rampant and be dangerous to life and prosperity. However, if carefully ordered and properly harnessed, nature is vital and regenerative. A Zen temple provided an idealized fractal model of nature in harmony.

The primary functions of a Zen temple, as encoded in its architecture, are twofold: first, a Zen temple *disciplines* the world; that is, it is an architectural apparatus that ensures balance and order within nature. The temple itself is designed to be a landscape that meaningfully operates on and actively orders everything within its walls. Everything

has a proper place within the system to ensure an organic harmony, and coercive pressure must be applied to that which is out of place.

A landscape thus ordered and disciplined could be said to be alive, in an organic sense: each aspect works in synergy with the others to create a whole that is greater than the sum of its constituent parts. Like an ecosystem, a Zen temple is regenerative and self-perpetuating if properly maintained, harnessing the ebb and flow of nature in such a way that allowed the whole to thrive and perpetuate. Thus, a Zen temple's second primary function is to actively *cultivate* nature, correcting and adjusting to maintain the ideal balance. Constant vigilance, daily care and maintenance must be taken to keep the powerful forces of nature from falling out of check, and becoming dangerous. Failure to adapt would lead to the death of the temple, as an organic entity.

A Zen temple thus provides an architectural model of an idealized universe, but also an allegorical model for human beings, at both an anatomical and social level. However, the Zen temple's more important function is to serve as an apparatus for the proper disciplining and cultivation of a living being. As a disciplining space, a Zen temple is designed to apply powerful coercive pressure to individual bodies within its space (Foucault 1977).

In this regard, my first working answer to the question "what is a Zen temple?" was this: a Zen temple is a manifestation of coercive, disciplinary power, one that seeks to remake those under its purview in its idealized model of the way things ought to be.

As a material artifact, however, Sōjiji is a human construction. I will now turn to the story of how a small temple was itself carefully cultivated by its caretakers, ultimately becoming a major cultural force.

Keizan Jōkin, "Mother" of Sōtō Zen

Much of what we know of Keizan's life comes from his own autobiography, as recorded in the *Tōkokki* ("Records of Tōkoku").[1] The *Tōkokki* was Keizan's second major opus, after the *Denkōroku* ("Record of the Transmission of the Light"), a series of lectures on the lives of the Sōtō Zen line of patriarchs which he began in 1300.

Keizan compiled the text of the *Tōkokki* in the latter years of his life (1312-1325), intending for the manuscript to stand as a permanent legacy after he died. Leaving a record of one's life was a common practice of Chinese and Japanese Buddhist masters. In this regard, the *Tōkokki* is not exceptional: indeed, conforming to the genre of which it is a part, much of Keizan's autobiography can be considered apocryphal, with many details of his "extraordinariness" shared in common to the hagiographies of eminent Buddhist masters (Faure 1996: 32). From a literary perspective, one of the purposes of Keizan's writing the *Tōkokki* was to write himself into the lineage of Sōtō Zen patriarchs whose lives he had already described in the *Denkōroku*.

Still, the episodes from his life he chose to include in his autobiography reveal a man whose activity in this world was deeply intertwined with the visions he saw in dreams. Many of the chapters in the *Tōkokki* begin by describing a dream that Keizan saw, either while sleeping or while sitting zazen. The dreams he describes are rich in mythological imagery and personal significance to Keizan, as evidenced by the central role they play in his recollections.

Keizan had a lifelong association with Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion, through the influence of his mother, a deeply devout woman named Ekan. In the *Tōkokki*,

[1] The title is derived from Yōkōji's mountain name, Tōkokusan.

Keizan recounts Kannon's intercession in his own birth: one night, Ekan dreamed that she "was swallowing the warmth of the morning sun" (*Tōkokki* 96). In the morning, Ekan discovered she was pregnant. To his mother, Keizan was a "*mōshigo*" – a promised child – bestowed upon her by Kannon herself. She redoubled her devotional efforts, prostrating herself before Kannon 1333 times every day[2], praying that her unborn child be born to become a "holy man, an inspirational priest, a heavenly personage" (*Tōkokki* 96).

Keizan was born in 1268 in Echizen Province, what is now present day Fukui Prefecture. Keizan's birth name was Gyōshō ("Moving Birth"), a name given to him because his mother gave birth as she was walking. As a child, Keizan was said to be possessed of an unnatural precocity when it came to religious matters. He was said to be able to recite sutras from memory after hearing them only once.

Keizan spent his early childhood with his grandmother, who had been a lay follower of Dōgen; his mother had taken the tonsure and became abbess of a convent (Bodiford 1993: 90). At the age of eight, Keizan received tonsure at Eiheiji by Tettsū Gikai, a priest who would continue to be of significant influence to Keizan throughout the course of his life. Keizan formally entered Eiheiji as a novice at thirteen, where he trained under the abbacy of Koun Ejō, Dōgen's successor. When Ejō died, the abbacy and Dōgen's robe, symbol of succession, passed to Gikai. Gikai soon left Eiheiji owing to internal conflict, and established Daijōji in 1292 what is present-day Kanazawa City. Keizan would soon follow his old teacher to Daijōji.

While in residence at Daijōji, Keizan would encounter his two most influential disciples: Meihō Sotetsu in 1294 and Gasan Jōseki in 1295 (Bodiford 1993: 64). Gikai

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[2] Accounts differ on this minute point. Some versions of the *Tōkokki* claim that Ekan made either 1333 or 3333 prostrations a day, while other accounts claim a more forgiving 333 prostrations a day.

groomed Keizan for the abbacy, and transmitted to Keizan the Sōtō Zen Dharma lineage in 1295. Keizan was thus made the fourth in line after Dōgen in the lineage of Japanese Sōtō Zen. Unlike his predecessors, however, Keizan would never hold a high office at Eiheiji, a fact that would become politically significant nearly six centuries later.

Keizan succeeded to the abbacy of Daijōji in 1298, and held the office until 1311. In 1312, Keizan was given land to establish Yōkōji. Yōkōji was to be Keizan's living legacy, and he and his disciples worked diligently to cultivate relationships with patrons willing to provide financial and material support to his venture. Both symbolically and architecturally, Yōkōji was a monument to Keizan's claims to legitimacy as heir to the Japanese Sōtō Zen lineage. At Yōkōji, Keizan enshrined relics that linked him materially to the patriarchs who had come before him: to Gikai, to Ejō, to Dōgen, and finally to Tendō Nyōjō, the Chinese priest who transmitted the Sōtō Zen lineage to Dōgen, enabling the latter to bring Sōtō Zen from China to Japan (Faure 1996: 51).

The Founding of Sōjiji

In 1321, Keizan was offered the stewardship of a small private temple known as Morooka Kannondō (or alternately, Morookadera) situated in a remote area in the north of the Noto Peninsula. The temple was little more than a simple wooden enclosure housing an image of the bodhisattva Kannon. While nominally dedicated to the Shingon sect of Japanese Buddhism, it was common practice at the time for a temple to "convert" to whatever sect the resident priest happened to belong – the building itself was less

important than what took place inside. Its most recent priest had been a Shūgendō ascetic. Keizan's presence and practice had the effect of rededicating the temple to Sōtō Zen.

Keizan renamed his "new" temple Shōgakusan Sōjiji. His choice for the mountain name, Shōgakusan, was merely an alternate reading of Morooka. As for the temple name, Sōjiji, there is some mystery. The word *sōji* can mean "preservation of memory", "preservation of good works", or "mental concentration" – all auspicious readings for a temple name (Nodomi 2007: 2). However, there may be another explanation: the consensus among modern scholars is that *sōji* most likely refers to a *dharani*, a genre of magico-religious intonations used in ceremonies and rituals (Seckel 1985: 376; Nodomi 2007: 2). *Dharani*, a Sanskrit term, is commonly translated into Japanese as *shingon*. Since Morooka Kannondō had originally been dedicated to the Shingon Buddhist sect, Keizan's choice for a new temple name could conceivably be a cleverly elegant way of saying "same temple, new ownership."

Thus did Shōgakusan Sōjiji come into being as a Sōtō Zen temple. Not long after, Keizan recorded several wondrous visions about his new temple. In his first vision, he saw Sōjiji not as the lone wooden structure that currently sat on the land, but a large temple complex, bustling with people. When he awoke from the dream, Keizan said prophetically, "This temple is a powerful place from which the destiny of the Buddha's dharma can be fulfilled. If my own efforts on behalf of the dharma cry out, my voice will transcend the world" (Momose 2002: 2009).

In a second dream, Kannon herself appeared to Keizan commanding him to "build a gate," after which two great birds spread their wings and sailed aloft. After the temple gate (*sanmon*) was constructed, the bodhisattvas Kannon, Manjū, and Jizō (known

collectively as the *hōkō bosatsu*, the "bodhisattvas of eternal light") appeared to Keizan above the newly-built gate, leading Keizan to enshrine their images in its second story (Momose 2002: 211-12).

Despite its transcendent inspiration, the newly-repurposed Sōjiji got off to a slow start, with Keizan struggling to secure financial support for his new temple. In this regard, Keizan scored a major political coup by gaining the support of the resurgent imperial faction hoping to win back control of Japan from the military government in Kamakura. In an imperial missive sent to Keizan in 1322, Emperor Go-Daigo proclaimed that Sōjiji was to be the "Foremost center for the spreading of Japanese Sōtō to the world" (*Nihon Sōtō shusse daiichi dōjō*) and empowered Keizan to wear the purple robe, a symbol of imperial favor (Momose 2002: 243; Sekiguchi 1995: 2).[3] This imperial support would reap dividends following the Emperor's "restoration" in 1333, after which prominent families donated financial and material resources to Sōjiji in a show of support for the imperial cause (Bodiford 1993: 99).

Construction of Sōjiji's Monk's Hall (*sōdō*) – necessary for housing a community of monks – was completed in 1324. On the 29th day of the fifth month of that year, the Monk's Hall was dedicated, and Sōjiji's monastic order was formally established. In the seventh month of 1324, Keizan stepped down from the abbacy, and Gasan Jōseki was formally installed as the second abbot of Sōjiji (Muromine 1967: 239). Sōjiji's "first class" of monastics was comprised of twenty-eight monks who took the precepts following Gasan's installation.

[3] Bodiford believes that the documents showing a relationship between Keizan and Go-Daigo to have likely been forgeries as part of an early controversy between Sōjiji and Yōkōji (1993: 101). Both temples have similar correspondence between Keizan and the emperor, each purportedly claiming that the holding temple was the one Go-Daigo intended to receive imperial honors.

The nascent monastic community at Sōjiji was given explicit instructions for everyday life in the monastery, daily and monthly rituals, and funeral rites for abbots in a monastic Rule known as the *Keizan Shingi*. At a time where monastic practice differed widely even among temples in the same lineage, Keizan recognized a need to consolidate and standardize the varied monastic customs and traditions, rebranding the whole for use by future generations of descendants.

Keizan died at Yōkōji the following year.

The *Gasan-ha* and the Flourishing of Sōtō Zen

After Keizan's death, there were several years of peace between his descendants. Those who claimed descent from Keizan through Meihō Sotetsu was based at Yōkōji, while the faction that traced their lineage through Gasan Jōseki – known as the *Gasan-ha* – were based at Sōjiji. For a time, Gasan even simultaneously held the abbacy of both Sōjiji and Yōkōji. Stories from the time tell of Gasan commuting on almost daily basis between the two temples via a fifty kilometer path through the hills of the Noto Peninsula that would become known as the *Gasan-dō*, or "Gasan's Road." That Gasan was believed to traverse fifty kilometers in a matter of minutes was attributed to special powers earned by his dedication to his practice, and became part of the folklore of the Noto region. This had a unique and lasting effect on the morning services of both temples: at Yōkōji, the Daihi Shin Darani was chanted at double speed in order to allow Gasan to leave quickly; at Sōjiji the same chant was intoned at half speed in order to give Gasan time to arrive.

This stylistic adaptation can still be found in the morning ceremonies of both temples today.

Despite being the "younger" disciple of Keizan (a critical point in a tradition that emphasizes primogeniture) the prestige and renown of Gasan and his disciples – and, by extension, Sōjiji itself – soon outstripped that of Meihō's line at Yōkōji.[4] Before Gasan's time, Zen clergy competed against other Buddhist clergy for support from the Japanese aristocracy. In contrast, Gasan and his disciples understood that much could be gained by ministering to the religious needs of the more populous farming and merchant classes.

Gasan encouraged his disciples to be entrepreneurs. Priests from Gasan's line traveled throughout Japan, bringing with them a new religious innovation: Sōtō-branded funerals and memorial rites which promised immediate salvation to the deceased. While innovative, these new practices were firmly couched in the language and customs of local funerary practices. The efforts of these charismatic Sōtō Zen teachers drew immense popular support among the poorer agricultural population which, in turn, influenced the decision of local landowners and samurai nobility to provide the sect with political, financial and material patronage.

Another key innovation implemented by Gasan's disciples was to mandate that all priests who traced their line through Gasan share the burden of the abbacy at Sōjiji, as well as to make yearly pilgrimages and donations to Sōjiji for ceremonies observing Keizan and Gasan's memorial rites. As will be discussed in Chapter 3, the political and financial effect of these policies was enormous: by pressuring new priests in Gasan's line

[4] Yōkōji itself faced repeated setbacks, culminating in its being razed in 1468, during the violent conflicts of the Warring States period. Yōkōji never recovered from its destruction politically or financially, and by 1500 had ceased to be a major player in the Sōtō Zen sect. Work was done to recover Yōkōji during the peace of the early Edo Period, but the temple was destroyed again – this time by typhoon – in 1674. Yōkōji was rebuilt in the 19th century, but is today a mere echo of its former self (Faure 1991: 7-8).

to become abbots of Sōjiji, the faction gained a surplus of "former abbots" when these priests stepped down. The title lent prestige to the priest, and with prestige came the ability to attract lay support. More often than not, this support manifested in allowing the priest to establish new temples. As these priests were in Gasan's line, these temples would become branch temples of Sōjiji. This surge in temple holdings, combined with yearly donations, allowed Sōjiji's wealth and political influence to expand exponentially.

It was from Sōjiji, therefore, that Sōtō Zen flourished in Japan during the medieval period. Although censuses of sectarian temples were not taken before the eighteenth century, Bodiford (1993: 110) conservatively estimates that in the two hundred years between 1450 and 1650, an average of forty-three Sōtō Zen temples and monasteries were established each year.[5] By the first official temple census in 1745, there were over 17,500 Sōtō Zen affiliated temples in Japan.[6] Of these, 16,197 were branch temples affiliated with Sōjiji with only 1,370 affiliating with Eiheiji (Nodomi 2007: 8).

The Parishioner System

Following the bloody civil wars of the late-16th century, the year 1600 saw the dawn of a new political reality in Japan under the banner of the Tokugawa family. From its earliest days, the Tokugawa regime was on guard against any potential challenges to its rule. While the rival clans who had opposed the Tokugawa forces during the civil wars

[5] It is worth noting that a large percentage of these "temples" began, like Sōjiji had, as little more than simple wooden structures, often but not always housing a Buddhist image, and usually lacking a resident priest. It would not be until the seventeenth century that many of these small shrines would become full-fledged temples with clergy and a parishioner base (Williams 2005: 18).
[6] Bodiford (1993: 110) puts the number at 17,549; Nodomi's reading (2007:8) shows eighteen additional temples, placing the total at 17,567.

were relatively easy for the new government to handle – they were banished to the islands of Kyūshū and Shikoku – Christianity, introduced by Catholic missionaries who accompanied the Portuguese and Spanish trading vessels arriving in Japanese ports, proved a more insidious threat. According to Williams (2005), "the threat of Christianity…lay partly in its Biblical teachings that seemed counter to Japan's established religious traditions, but principally in the issue of Christian loyalty owed to God and to the pope over Japan's secular authority"(16). While Covell suggests that the suspicion cast on European missionaries and Japanese Christian converts may have been a deliberate exaggeration that the Tokugawa government "posed to the country as a pretext for implementing measures of social control", by 1614 Christianity was formally outlawed in Japan (2005: 24). Over the next several decades, a number of policies designed to root out pockets of Christian holdouts and secure Tokugawa hegemony over the Japanese populace were put into motion.

The Tokugawa shogunate recognized that the existing network of Buddhist temples in Japan was an ideal, if not convenient, resource that could be used to mitigate the threat of Christian subversives, as well as to monitor and regulate the activities of the Japanese people. A policy of mandatory temple affiliation under which the heads of every household were required to register their families with a Buddhist temple was enacted in 1635, becoming universal throughout Japan by 1638 (Covell 2005: 24). In most cases, the choice of the temple at which to register – and consequently one's sectarian affiliation – was determined not by belief in or loyalty to any set of teachings, but by little more than a given temple's proximity to one's home. Once a family was registered with a specific temple and sect, it was almost impossible to transfer or otherwise change one's affiliation,

save for women who married into a family belonging to a different sect (Williams 2005: 21-3).

These de facto temple "parishioners" became known as *danna* (from the Sanskrit *dāna*, meaning "donating" or "giving"), or more commonly, *danka*, a neologism which combined the characters for "donor" and "family/household." As the term implies, the parishioner families had certain financial responsibilities vis-à-vis the temple with which they were registered, namely, the upkeep of the temple and support of its resident priest. Moreover, parishioners were beholden to the temple for the performance of all funerals and memorial rituals; it was prohibited for the laity to perform funerals themselves, or to retain the services of priests outside their registered sect. Perhaps most instructive, parishioners were obliged to visit their temple on specific festival days, as well as to allow the priest into their homes at least once a year. While couched in pious intentions, this visitation allowed the priest access to inspect the home and ancestral altar for evidence of Christian worship. Failure to fulfill any of these responsibilities gave the temple's resident priest the right to remove the parishioner family from the temple register, exposing the family to social sanction, accusations of heresy, heavy fines, and even the threat of execution (Covell 2005: 25).

This compulsory temple registration was known as the *danka seido*, or "parishioner system". By making financial support of one's family temple a universal legal obligation across all levels of Japanese society, the *danka seido* represented another fundamental shift in the nature of lay-clerical relations in the practice of Buddhism. No longer was patronage of Buddhist clergy and temples the purview of a wealthy few; temple priests were able to draw almost at will

upon the financial and material resources of their parishioner base for the needs of the temple, and for their own personal livelihoods. No longer were priests required to be charismatic leaders or exemplars of religious practice to draw popular support; temple parishioners were literally captive audiences who added to a temple's coffers whether or not they felt any personal religious conviction or connection to the teachings of the sect. Perhaps most significantly, no longer were the performance of funerals and memorial observances the responsibility of the members of the local community; with the advent of the *danka seido*, these responsibilities shifted to the Buddhist clergy, who now found themselves in a legally-defined role as funeral and memorial ritual specialists.

Equally significant were the lasting consequences of the parishioner system for religious practice by the laity: by registering families – rather than individuals – in perpetuity, a temple was guaranteed financial and material support over successive generations of families, free from the tides of popular or individual religious sentiment. Regardless of whether this support was given willingly or by coercion, however, parishioner households across all strata of Japanese society now had a vested interest in the daily life and maintenance of what had become, in essence, "our temple" (*uchi no bodaiji*).

The family temple was more than the material embodiment of a family's labor and resources expended over time; it was also the temple at which a family's and, in many cases, an entire community's ancestors were buried and venerated, and where the living and their descendants could expect to be buried and venerated. Caring for the well-being of the family temple ensured that a person could satisfy their filial obligations in

life, and that they would be given the same honors from their descendants when they passed to the "other shore".

Clashing Titans

Despite Sōjiji's meteoric rise to prominence and power within the medieval Japanese religious field, Dōgen's Eiheiji was still respected and recognized as the origin point of the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect. However, a variety of factors – including a run of non-charismatic abbots and repeated factioning within its monastic community – prevented Eiheiji from becoming as politically significant as its position would have otherwise suggested. Eiheiji was recognized as *honzan* of the Sōtō Zen sect in 1507 (Bodiford 1993: 135), but the true political power remained with Sōjiji. The imperial court reversed its earlier designation, and in 1589, Sōjiji became recognized as the head temple of the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect (82).

For the next three hundred years, Sōjiji and Eiheiji routinely skirmished with one another, with each temple's faction taking sides over a variety of disputes, ranging from the monumental to the trivial. Sōtō Zen practice itself was deeply factionalized, with Eiheiji-line priests and Sōjiji-line priests holding to different standards. Even today, subtle differences in pronunciation or movement communicates to the observant viewer whether a priest was trained at Sōjiji or Eiheiji.

These conflicts could be explained as family rivalry, but the schism between Sōjiji and Eiheiji hinted at deeper issues: Eiheiji-line priests resented Sōjiji's widespread influence, while Sōjiji-line priests resented having to justify their status as *honzan*

without historical primacy. In 1868, the abbot of Eiheji petitioned the new Meiji government to reverse the centuries-old status quo, arguing that Eiheiji should be made the *honzan* of the Sōtō Zen sect (Nodomi 2007: 14). Still, when the political support behind the Buddhist institution was withdrawn and the laws mandating parishioner registration were repealed in 1871, Eiheiji and Sōjiji banded together, issuing a joint statement of solidarity in 1872. For the next two decades, Sōjiji and Eiheiji would work together to standardize and modernize the sect's practices, their efforts culminating the first edition of the Sōtō Zen ritual handbook for use throughout the sect (Muromine 1967: 247; Bodiford 1993: 82).

However, this peace was not to last. Behind the scenes, both temples still jockeyed for political position. The institutions themselves were at war, but the battles were fought in the guise of their historical founders: it was not "Sōjiji versus Eiheiji," but rather "Keizan versus Dōgen." Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* was first proffered as a "bible" (*kyōten*) for the Sōtō Zen sect; Sōjiji's faction countered by producing Keizan's *Denkōroku* in 1877. Historically, both works had limited religious significance in a practical sense, but in a new religious field influenced by Christianity – particularly its emphasis on its founder's teachings as encapsulated in a written work – their resurfacing reopened the old wounds regarding legitimacy and authority (Heine 2003: 174). The attacks got personal: Keizan was vilified for having corrupted Dōgen's "pure" Zen; Dōgen's importance was minimized in light of the contributions made by Keizan and his entrepreneurial descendants. The damage done to both parties was such that echoes of this controversy can still be heard today.

By 1892, the Sōjiji faction had had enough. A movement for the "separation and independence" (*bunri dokuritsu*) of Sōjiji led to the cessation of all formal ties with Eiheiji. On March 19, the abbot of Sōjiji issued a formal declaration of independence: "We voluntarily promulgate a statement of separation and independence, notify Eiheiji that all alliances between the two temples have been nullified, prohibit the Sōtō sect central administration, dissolve the Sōtō sect assembly, and furthermore petition the Home Minster to cancel all sect regulations and recognize our separation" (Muromine 1967: 542).

While Eiheiji still enjoyed its government-mandated status as *honzan* of the Sōtō Zen sect, it now faced a different problem: Sōjiji's secession had taken with it over 16,000 loyal temples, over ninety percent of the sect's total property holdings and income. In the meantime, Sōjiji pushed for official government recognition, either as *honzan*, or as head of its own legally-recognized branch sect.

After two years of silence between the two factions, it became clear that this was a mutually untenable position. The Ministry of Home Affairs became increasingly involved in the squabble, like a parent struggling to control two fighting children. Eiheiji had more to lose, but neither was Sōjiji gaining ground on its petitions to the government. Ultimately, the Ministry of Home Affairs forced the two sides to reconcile their differences, and in 1894 officially recognized both Sōjiji and Eiheiji as the two *honzan* of the Sōtō Zen sect. The two *honzan* issued a joint statement declaring that they were "both head temples, one body, not two" (*ryōzan ittai funi*) (Nodomi 2007: 15).

Correspondingly, Keizan was elevated to a position alongside Dōgen as one the two Patriarchs (*ryōso*) of the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect. Dōgen is recognized as the apical

ancestor (*kōso*, or "highest ancestor"), but Keizan is honored as *taiso*, the propagator of Sōtō Zen in Japan. Dōgen is presented as the "father" of Sōtō Zen, the one who planted the seed; in this imagery, Keizan became the "mother" under whose care the seeds matured and thrived (Sekiguchi 1995: 4). Paintings of the "One Buddha, Two Patriarchs" (*ichibutsu ryōso*) – the official image of the Sōtō Zen sect – depict the two priests facing one another, mediated by a shining Shakyamuni Buddha seated upon a lotus.

The Great Fire

The intrasectarian conflict between Sōjiji and Eiheiji damaged the already tenuous position of both temples. Less than four years after the two temples made peace, a sudden catastrophe dealt to Sōjiji what should have been a killing blow.

According to the official story, on the evening of April 13, 1898, the monk in charge of the night watch had gone to bed after neglecting to make his rounds of the temple. Had he made his rounds, he would have found candles still burning in the Daihōdō, the great ceremony hall that sat at a major juncture of the temple's network of wooden corridors. At approximately 9 pm, a strong wind knocked over a candle in the Daihōdō. Flames soon engulfed the hall. A temple monitor raised the alarm bell to wake the sleeping monks, but their access to the hall was blocked by the fire. Gusting winds quickly spread the fire throughout the temple complex in both directions. The monks rescued what treasures they could, but by morning the entire temple complex was gone (Muromine 1967: 112).

Fire was a common danger to old wooden temples, and the fire of 1898 was not the first time Sōjiji had been ravaged by fire. In fact, Sōjiji had only recently recovered from a devastating fire earlier that century: in the 21st day of the first month of 1806, a similar fire had swept through the temple precincts. Governmental permission to rebuild was granted in 1809, and the temple was gradually rebuilt at the rate of one building per year between 1812 and 1831.

However, there had been major political and economic shifts that made the 1898 fire more threatening for the future of Sōjiji as a viable institution. Under the Tokugawa feudal system, Sōjiji had a powerful friend and benefactor in the Maeda clan that ruled the Kaga Domain (present day Ishikawa Prefecture). When Sōjiji was destroyed in 1803, the Maeda clan spearheaded efforts to rebuild the important temple as quickly as possible, contributing money, resources and labor. By 1898, however, the old feudal system had been abolished for nearly a quarter of a century, and the Maeda clan – a close ally of the Tokugawa military government – had been stripped of nearly all of its economic and political capital by the new Meiji government. The Maeda family, which had supported Sōjiji for nearly three hundred years, could no longer aid the temple that had come to rely upon them.

Moreover, the political and religious fields of Japan had changed dramatically in the ninety-two years between the fires. All sects of Japanese Buddhism were playing a defensive game in respect to the Meiji government's increased regulation of Buddhist temples and priests, which at times had been hostile and persecutory, and even violent (see Ketelaar 1999; Jaffe 2000). By deregulating the parishioner system, Buddhist temples could no longer rely on a steady income of donation from their *danka*. While the

majority of Sōtō Zen temples were nominally loyal to Sōjiji, branch temples themselves were in dire financial straits, some resorting to selling off their holdings to make ends meet. There was no guarantee that the funds could be raised to rebuild Sōjiji.

Despite its complete destruction, all hope was not lost. The oft-repeated official history credits two visionary men – Ishikawa Sōdō and Asano Sōichirō – who would spearhead the effort to rebuild Sōjiji. Initially, the hope was to rebuild Sōjiji on the Noto Peninsula where it had stood for close to six centuries. Within two years, however, a movement was started that would move Sōjiji across the country, closer to the new national capital in Tokyo.

At the time of the fire, Ishikawa Sōdō was serving as the prior (*kannin*) of Sōjiji. He quickly moved to action, requesting financial assistance from the Sōtō central office, and appealing to Sōjiji's large network of branch temples for aid. In October of 1898, only six months after the fire, Ishikawa convened a meeting of Sōjiji's branch temples, where he presented a proposal for reconstruction. Through the auspices of the Sōtō central office, the abbots of Sōjiji and Eiheiji issued a joint proclamation calling for the immediate reconstruction of Sōjiji (Muromine 1967: 114). Ishikawa wrote the preamble to this proclamation.

Across the country in Yokohama, entrepreneur Asano Sōichirō was in the planning stages of a massive project to reshape the landscape of the Tokyo Bay to conform to his vision of Japan's future. Asano would have been familiar with Sōjiji through his first business venture, shipping mercantile goods between Hokkaidō and the Noto Peninsula (Kawaguchi 1985: 117). After Asano relocated to Yokohama in the 1870s, he began amassing his fortune reselling coal and coal tar to Tokyo factories. As

his business empire grew, Asano moved into the cement business, at first leasing a government-owned cement factory, and later establishing his own factories. He allied himself with Shibusawa Eichi and Yasuda Zenjirō, titans of the new Japanese financial world. With their financial backing, Asano established more than sixty companies, including TKK Lines in 1898, which would become the leading trans-Pacific service between Yokohama – the "Gateway to Europe and the Americas" – and San Francisco (Katō, et al. 1990: 116).

Asano had seen for himself the benefits of European and American industrial techniques, most notably the practice of building factories as close to the waterfront as possible to facilitate loading commodities and goods directly onto ships with a minimum of overland transport. While the ports of Tokyo and Yokohama were already being utilized for commerce, he recognized that the shallows between the two cities was an ideal landscape for putting his plan into action. Asano set his sights on a massive land reclamation scheme that would utterly transform the shallows of Tsurumi to allow for rapid industrial and maritime growth.

Even at the turn of the century, Tsurumi was still an unremarkable village along the Tōkaidō highway, whose major industries were shallow water fishing and farming. Moreover, Tsurumi had gained notoriety as the site of the 1862 Namamugi Incident (also known as the Richardson Affair) in which four foreign nationals were attacked and wounded, one mortally, after failing to quit the road for the passing entourage of a samurai noble. While the residents of the small village were innocent bystanders – the incident could have happened anywhere – the ripples that were sent forth from this tiny village had immense effects on the international political scene: in addition to increased

foreign military presence in Japan, the incident led to the Anglo-Satsuma War, and soon after, an alliance which would be instrumental in the rebellion that would topple the Tokugawa government.

Although official records do not detail what, if any, dialogue took place between Asano and his associates and the Sōjiji administration, we do know that Asano and Yasuda – himself the son of a samurai retainer of the Maeda family – were instrumental in helping to craft the plan to move Sōjiji from its ancestral home on the Noto Peninsula to Tsurumi (Saitō 2007: 54). Their position was strengthened by a growing faction within the sect that saw opportunity in Sōjiji's tragedy: a chance for a temple to relocate itself away from its remote and rural base and closer to the seat of political and economic power. To this end, in May 1900, a coalition of Sōtō abbots and parishioners from Nagano Prefecture sent a letter to Sōjiji's abbot, requesting that temple administration consider moving the temple closer to Tokyo.

Such an arrangement would be mutually beneficial to both parties: by allying with Asano and his associates, Sōjiji would gain the patronage of a powerful and wealthy coterie that was destined to become the new political elite of Japan. In addition, if Asano's plan was successful, Sōjiji would gain first access to the international visitors who were arriving in greater numbers for business and travel. In addition, Sōjiji would gain the ability to send Sōtō Zen – as embodied in its priests and publications – out to the world, in the model of Christian missionaries. For Asano and his associates, their "new" Tsurumi would benefit from becoming a major religious center almost overnight. Sōjiji's network of temples, priests and parishioners throughout Japan would ensure a vested interest in the reconstruction of their *honzan*, leading to increased monetary and material

investment in the town, as well as visitors who would come in droves to what had previously been a hamlet of little importance. The more cynical might also note that sponsoring Sōjiji would provide a pious mask by which to hide their almost Faustian enterprise to remake the landscape of Tsurumi in their own image.

An inspection committee from Sōjiji visited Tsurumi in 1903 to survey the landscape. The decision to move Sōjiji to Tsurumi was finalized in secret on June 18, 1904, nearly three years before the public would be made aware that such a move was even under consideration. On July 3, 1904 another secret meeting was held with the abbot of Jōganji, the temple that occupied the hill known as Tsuru-no-oka, the "Hill of Cranes". The meeting was held to hammer out the details of his "donation" of the considerable land holdings of the temple to the cause of rebuilding Sōjiji in Tsurumi. Sōjiji's official temple history describes the meeting between the abbot, Katō Umio, and the delegation from Sōjiji: "Standing at the top of the stairs leading to Jōganji, Katō put forth his wishes to donate his land. With both parties smiling, the delegation conveyed, 'We've arrived!'. Katō's smile responded, 'I understand. Welcome.' Wordlessly, their intentions were conveyed to each other" (Muromine 1967: 121). Whether this "wordless" transition of power took place as described is less significant than the fact that its recounting is meant to invoke the archetypal Zen story in which the Buddha, holding aloft a flower, wordlessly transmitted authority over the community of Buddhist monastics to his disciple Mahakashō. Mahakashō's smile signified that he was a worthy successor, fit to be the next leader of the community. By framing Katō's transfer of Jōganji to the delegation from Sōjiji in these archetypal terms, Sōjiji's chroniclers invoke the power of

the myth to demonstrate that the voluntary transfer of Jōganji was done to ensure the continued prosperity of the Sōtō Zen dharma.

While Jōganji and its three lakes had been a devotional site for the medieval cult of Yakushi Nyōrai, Tsuru-no-oka was an auspicious place to build a temple that could symbolically stand as a guardian of the new Japanese national polity. Overlooking Tokyo Bay, Sōjiji would be visible from the new harbor being built off of Tsurumi's reclaimed shallows. The temple would be constructed to face out over the harbor, facing eastward toward the Americas and Europe.

In May 1906, Ishikawa ascended to Sōjiji's abbacy. Among his first acts as abbot was to reestablish momentum of the rebuilding office, which had been put on hold for the duration of the Russo-Japanese War. At a meeting in Tokyo in July 1907, it was "publicly" decided – the decision having been finalized in secret three years earlier – to move Sōjiji to Tsurumi (Muromine 1967: 117). Immediately, an opposition movement formed, comprised largely of citizens of Noto who (rightly) feared that moving Sōjiji would have a severe negative impact on the income and development of the region. The Kanazawa Prefectural governor was called on to mediate the dispute, and in January 1908, he decided in favor of the pro-relocation group. Plans were immediately put into action to begin the relocation of the Sōjiji to its new home.

One last point deserves to be made: although there is no extant evidence to question the official story of the fire at Noto Sōjiji, the timing of the fire and complete devastation of the temple has always stood out to me as curious enough to suspect arson. Given the events of the previous twenty-five years – the loss of regional political and financial patronage, the vicious conflict with Eiheiji, the establishment of the national

seat of government in Tokyo, and the rise of Yokohama as a city of international commerce – Sōjiji had everything to lose by being permanently rooted on the Noto Peninsula. Simply put, if Sōjiji remained where it was, it would have been even more remote from the seat of power than it had been previously. Most other sects of Japanese Buddhism had a *honzan* in the vicinity of Kyoto, still the cultural capital of the country; Sōtō Zen, in contrast, was burdened by having both of its head temples in remote and rural areas. Moreover, in light of its long-standing conflict with Eiheiji, moving Sōjiji closer to the new capital in Tokyo would allow Sōjiji to literally out-maneuver its rival by placing itself between the centers of political (Tokyo) and commercial (Yokohama) power.

That the destruction of Noto Sōjiji became, almost paradoxically, a moment of great opportunity for the temple should go without question. For the time being, however, history is silent on whether this opportunity was intentionally brought about by arson, or – as the official story goes – grasped after the fact by quick-thinking stewards like Ishikawa and Asano.

Starting Over

Following the official decision in 1908, much work needed to be done to enable Sōjiji to open its doors in Tsurumi as quickly as possible. Two buildings were constructed first: the Chōryū-shitsu, which would be the abbot's residence, and the Hōkōdō, which was to serve as the ceremony hall until a suitable Dharma Hall could be built. The Hōkōdō was a much older building, donated in its entirety from a Sōtō temple

in Yamagata Prefecture. The structure was disassembled, transported across the country, and reassembled in its new home at Sōjiji (Muromine 1967: 124).

The temple was officially opened to great fanfare on November 5, 1911. The memorial tablets of Keizan and Dōgen arrived by train in the morning; Ishikawa, in his role as abbot, and an entourage of priests and dignitaries met them at the station. Many thousands of onlookers gathered to witness the tablets' procession to the Hōkōdō where they would be formally enshrined at Sōjiji (Muromine 1967: 124).

Despite the grandeur, Sōjiji began its new life in Tsurumi at a considerable handicap. As part of the decision to move Sōjiji from Noto to Tsurumi, the temple administration was forced to concede that those families who were previously registered as *danka* of Sōjiji would remain parishioners of the temple in its new incarnation as Sōjiji Betsuin (later renamed Soin, "ancestral temple"). It was further agreed that these families would not be tapped for financial resources to build the new Sōjiji in Tsurumi (Muromine 1967: 117; Nodomi 2007: 21). Despite considerable financial and material resources donated by Sōtō clergy and parishioners throughout Japan to the cause of establishing Sōjiji in Tsurumi, the concessions made to the people of Noto saw to it that Sōjiji arrived in its new home with essentially no parishioners of its own to support the temple in the long term.

For nearly a decade, the new Sōjiji survived mainly on the skill of its administrators in securing donations from Sōtō branch temples, private donors, and through national fundraising efforts. The land upon which Sōjiji was built was a donation, as were entire buildings like the Hōkōdō and, later, the Jihōkan. Private donations from

wealthy and influential patrons helped keep the struggling temple afloat during difficult financial times like the financial depression that gripped Japan after the first World War.

Still, the years between 1912 and 1924 were filled with near constant construction and expansion of Sōjiji's campus. The temple buildings were constructed in order of importance to the daily life of both an administrative and ceremonial temple: first to be built were buildings that were absolutely essential to the ritual life of the temple, followed by a second phase (1912-1915) in which buildings necessary for a community of monks to train and to conduct their daily rituals were built. A third phase (1916-1921) saw the administrative and public buildings come into being, and a fourth phase – which coincided with Japan's surge in imperial nationalism between 1921 and 1937 – saw the construction of buildings related to State Shintō and the Imperial Household (Muromine 1967: 124).

Sōjiji's Taishō era administrators must have realized early on that with the *danka* system having been repealed, the temple could not guarantee a reliable stream of parishioner revenue to fill the temple's coffers. Throughout the Taishō era, Sōjiji's policies towards the laity shifted dramatically from historical precedent, forgoing the establishment of a sizable parishioner base to instead foster a relationship with its new neighbors in Tsurumi through charitable works and establishment of groups and organizations designed to attract "believers" (*shinto*)[7] instead of parishioners. In this respect, Sōjiji was clearly borrowing from the playbook of Christian (primarily Protestant) churches and charitable organizations which provided a model for attracting

[7] Another of many potentially frustrating homonyms in Japanese, *shinto* as "believer" is not to be confused with *shintō* as "new arrival" (discussed in chapter 2), or the religion Shintō.

new adherents without the need for social or legal pressures that defined the traditional *danka* system.

The Great Kantō Earthquake of September 1, 1923 caused a sudden jump in Sōjiji's priorities back to the idea of a parishioner base. The earthquake caused relatively light structural damage to Sōjiji's buildings, with the most notable casualty being the collapse of the front awning of the Jihōkan. While the quake itself was powerful, the real disaster came moments later. Because it was lunchtime, cooking fires were burning in homes throughout the heavily-populated corridor between Tokyo and Yokohama. What began as small, localized fires raged into a firestorm that burned for three days, and left 71 percent of Tokyo residents and 85 percent of Yokohama residents homeless. All told, the conflagration killed over one hundred thousand people. Sōjiji's elevated position on a hill above Tsurumi and protective sheath of trees and vegetation provided a natural firewall that protected the nascent temple from the disaster taking place around it.

In the aftermath of the earthquake and fire, the residents of Tsurumi and the wards areas adjacent to it sought a place to bury and memorialize their dead. Sōjiji had acres of undeveloped land holdings, and was in a unique position to minister to their needs. While the land had originally been set aside for future expansion of the temple precincts, Sōjiji had more than enough land to establish a sizable cemetery. Sōjiji was swamped with applications from the laity to establish family graves at the temple. To do so would establish the families as parishioners of Sōjiji. Despite having resigned themselves to a future without parishioner support, Sōjiji's administrators found themselves compelled to quickly change course and come to terms with its renewed role as a parishioner temple.

Still, Sōjiji did not abandon its new tack. Under the auspices of its "Social Works" (*Shakai Jigyō*) department, 1924 saw the founding of a tide of charitable organizations affiliated with the temple, including a college (now Tsurumi University), a hospital, a home for the blind, a dormitory for single mothers, and a middle and high school for girls. Of note is that the Sōjiji administrators established institutions specifically to benefit women and children: Keizan, it was claimed, had been an ardent supporter of women's equality in social and religious matters owing to the lifelong influence of his mother, grandmother and female followers. To establish social welfare programs to benefit women was therefore to continue his forward-thinking work.

Sōjiji during the Pacific War

Sōjiji's role during the Pacific War is a difficult story to tell. In a temple with such a long and detailed history, it was surprising to me to discover a twenty-five year gap between 1925 and 1950 of which not much history exists, either from personal accounts or in printed material. Even among scholars with a deep familiarity with Sōjiji's history, virtually none could tell me anything of the temple during the wartime period. While doing several months of archival research, I was shuttled between various sources, all of whom suggested someone else who "who might have more information". Following various contacts and leads ultimately brought me full circle, with little to show for it.

First-hand accounts or records of Sōjiji's wartime involvement were virtually impossible to find. While it was possible that wartime stories were being hidden from me

lest the shadows of the past darken my retelling of Sōjiji's story in the present, my gut feeling is that the information I was looking for may no longer exist in active memory. Further, interviews with elderly priests and long-time residents of Tsurumi in their seventies and eighties did not reveal many details of Sōjiji at this time: the oldest person I spoke with who had any first-hand knowledge of Tsurumi during wartime was only twelve years old at the end of the war. Her most vivid memories were of the destruction, the starvation, the fear, and the sadness – she and her contemporaries were too young to remember much else.

What few details I was able to discover illuminated Sōjiji's wartime story in relief. Owing to its proximity to the military-industrial port that sat on its very doorstep, Sōjiji did have a relationship with the Imperial Navy. Although very little remains of this relationship, what little evidence there is sits in plain sight, a part of the temple landscape. Calligraphy hung in the main audience hall of the Shiuntai is credited to Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō, a hero of the Japan's wars with China and Russia. More telling is that Sōjiji is the final resting place of Ōnishi Takijirō, vice admiral of the Imperial Navy who is credited with establishing the *kamikaze* pilot corps. A younger priest recalled being told that Sōjiji's precincts were used for a time as a drilling ground for sailors from the Imperial Navy.

Printed records I found came mainly from the temple's self-published bulletin, *Chōryū* which was initially published in its first series from 1928 until 1943. For the most part, the record from 1936 onward shows a temple whose official message, shared by nearly all Japanese religious institutions at the time, was of nationalistic support for the Emperor and Japan's international expansion. A 1937 serial article details Keizan's

relationship with Emperor Go-Daigo, a tacit demonstration of Sōjiji's claim to enjoying a long association with and support of the Imperial Household. This series corresponded with the completion of the Go-Daigo-ten Goreiden, a shrine dedicated to the Emperor situated directly behind the Butsuden, and Sōjiji's observance of Go-Daigo's 600th *onki* (memorial rite) that year.

Reports of missionary efforts in the colonies were also published in *Chōryū*, including a report of the visit by Sōjiji's abbot and his retinue to Manchuria and Korea (Aug. 1938). These reports regularly accompany articles such as "The Relationship Between Buddhism and the State" (Oct. 1937), "The Task of an Imperial Citizen is Self-Realization" (Aug. 1939) and "Perfecting Yourself through Zazen" (Jun. 1940). As the Pacific War accelerates after December 1941, the language of the temple bulletin becomes increasingly militaristic: "The Great Ideals of Our Nation's Founding" (March 1942), "Faith is Strength" (Oct. 1942), "Temples and the Greater East Asia War" (Dec. 1942), "Zen and the Warrior Spirit" (Jan. 1943). Following the deaths of two successive abbots in March and April 1943, and facing wartime paper shortages, *Chōryū* abruptly went silent in July 1943.

Much of the rest of the story can be pieced together by wartime history. By 1930, Asano's land reclamation plan for Tsurumi had succeeded beyond anyone's expectations. In Tsurumi alone, over two million square meters of shoreline had been reclaimed for industrial and mercantile use (Kawaguchi 1985: 121). The shoreline shared by Tsurumi and neighboring Kawasaki created the Keihin Industrial Corridor, as it came to be called, which linked the two metropolises of Tokyo and Yokohama. Following Japan's occupation of Manchuria in 1931, the factories of the Industrial Corridor were

increasingly retrofitted for production of materiel to support Japan's military machine (Katō, et al. 1990: 160).

Following Allied victories in the Pacific Theater, the bombers were in range of the Japanese islands by November 1944. While Tokyo and Yokohama provided important political and economic targets for the Allied air strikes, much of the Japanese war effort was sustained by the factories, metalworks, and shipyards that had been built up along the shallows of Tsurumi and Kawasaki. The factories of the Keihin Industrial Corridor were therefore high priority targets in the Allied raids. From November 1944 to the end of the war in August 1945, Tsurumi and its industries were the target of repeated Allied bombing sorties (*Tsurumi-ku shi* 1982: 564-566).

Most remember the photographs taken in the aftermath of the atomic devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, when tens of thousands of people and the buildings they occupied were blasted out of existence in the blink of an eye. Far fewer remember the bombing of Tokyo and Yokohama on the night between March 9 and 10, 1945, which would consume a comparable number of lives – over a hundred thousand, by conservative estimates. Using a combination of high incendiary ordinance and napalm, the Allied forces unleashed a firestorm that raged along the coastline from central Tokyo to Yokohama.

Standing less than a kilometer from the devastation being wrought on the factories and homes of Tsurumi, either an errant bomb or changing winds would have led to the complete destruction of the temple. Yet, while Tsurumi burned, Sōjiji stood, miraculously untouched by either flame or the wall of blistering heat carried by the strong winds that night.

For those who could escape the flames, Sōjiji's walls were sanctuary. As the fires slowly died down over many days, the bodies of the dead – when they could be found – were laid out in Sōjiji's hallways, and throughout the temple precincts. Residents of Tsurumi would come to Sōjiji and walk through its macabre landscape of burned corpses, searching for the remains of family and loved ones. Tsurumi would endure three more devastating strikes on April 15, May 14, with the worst coming on May 29. By the end of the war, the Allied destruction of Tsurumi was so complete that most survivors would never find closure.

"After the war, people needed more than a place to bury their dead," one priest told me. "They needed a place where they could come together to celebrate being alive. Sōjiji filled that need." As with the Great Kantō Earthquake, Sōjiji accepted people of all religious denominations. For many, religious affiliation was less important than practical concerns that the dead be properly memorialized as soon as possible. Once again, Sōjiji's parishioner base soared. The land set aside for Sōjiji's small cemetery was insufficient for the demand, and the temple administration annexed more of the temple's land reserves for the purpose of increasing the cemetery size.

Sōjiji in the Post-War Period

The last major push of temple membership came not from tragedy, but from prosperity. The post-war reconstruction led to decades of rapid economic growth, known as the "economic miracle." With its GDP growing at an average rate of over ten percent every year, Japan became a global industrial and financial superpower. This growth was

fueled in large party by a mass exodus of the youngest generation from rural regions to Japan's major cities like Tokyo and Yokohama, who had come to find jobs in the rebuilt factories and offices in the urban areas. By 1964 – nineteen years after its almost complete devastation – Tokyo had the largest population of any city in the world, at ten million people.

While it was common to keep close ties with their rural ancestral homes, an increasing number flocked to Japan's urban areas with little intention of ever going back. Many of the new urbanites were content with keeping their family's graves at the rural temples where they had stood for generations, but others sought either to relocate or reestablish a family grave at a more-accessible temple. From the 1950s through the 1970s, the demand for cemetery space at Japan's urban temples skyrocketed. As real estate prices soared, so too did prices for gravesites. Urban temples like Sōjiji benefited at the expense of their rural brethren. As with the two previous surges in membership, Sōjiji was able to transform its undeveloped land holdings into a more valuable commodity: parishioners. By the late 1970s, Sōjiji's parishioner base had taken on its contemporary character, estimated at over 5000 families. Today, Sōjiji's cemetery is almost a square kilometer in size, fully a third of the temple's total area.

Equally as significant, Sōjiji's central location between Tokyo and Yokohama meant that the temple sat on a well-traveled route that was to become the major railway and motor artery linking the two cities. Sōjiji became an easily accessible tourist destination for American soldiers during the Occupation, and later, for international travelers arriving by sea at the Port of Yokohama and by air at Haneda Airport.

Capitalizing on this, Sōjiji was able to emerge from the war having rebranded itself as an "international Zen garden" (*kokusai zen'en*).

Following the war, the temple administrators struggled to come to terms with what suddenly appeared to be the contradictory pull of two forces: one, the outwards push towards innovation and international outreach; the other, the inwards pull towards traditional funerary practices and dependency on parishioner revenue. In the decades that followed, internal policies and practices at Sōjiji shifted back and forth, often dramatically, between these priorities as national prosperity and international interest in Zen caused the temple and the Sōtō Zen sect to continuously question its direction.

By the 1960s, the US and Europe were in the midst of a "Zen Boom," in which interest and consumption of all things Zen-related reached a fevered pitch. Japan would follow suit with its own "Zen Boom" a decade or so later during the 1970s. International interest in Japanese Zen was both affirming and profitable to temples in Japan, but it often came at a cost: many who came seeking an experience of Zen were convinced that what they were looking for was a non-religious "philosophy," an answer to oppressive institutional religion in the West. Those who came to Japan to find "pure Zen" – at least, as they imagined it – were often turned off by traditional ritual practices that for centuries had defined daily life at Zen temples in Japan. Some enterprising clergy understood this notion and adapted their practice to suit the religious tourists' needs. Other priests balked at the idea of replacing their responsibility to their parishioners and their religion by catering to international fads, regardless of the potential income. Ever so imperceptibly, two "Zens" began to emerge: Zen as a religious service that catered to Japanese, and Zen as an internationally marketable commodity.

Sōjiji's size, status and location gave it enormous potential to capitalize on both of these emerging markets. While maintaining the daily ritual responsibility to its parishioners, the administration was also able to court national and international interest in Zen. Many of the most influential names involved in spreading Zen to Europe and the Americas – Deshimaru Taisen in France, Suzuki Shinryū in San Francisco, and Maezumi Taizan in Los Angeles, among others – had significant ties to Sōjiji during this period. Similarly, the clergy in training at the time had the opportunity to see firsthand the growth potential in international outreach.

A final push of expansion in the 1960s saw the construction of Sōjiji's largest public buildings. Timed to correspond with the celebrations planned for the six-hundredth anniversary of Gasan's death, the Daisodō was completed in 1965 and the Sanmon in 1969. Both structures are the largest of their kind in Japan: the Daisodō alone can fit more than two thousand people under its roof. As such, they are grand architectural statements of Sōjiji's renewed prosperity and ability to accommodate all who would come to the temple "to hear the teachings of Keizan". In addition to size, both structures were built for longevity by eschewing traditional cypress wood construction for the more-resistant and less-flammable reinforced ferroconcrete. Further distinguishing them from other temple buildings whose exteriors were the deep brown of aged wood, both the Daisodō and Sanmon were painted in a bright color scheme of pink and white, and capped with vibrant patina-green roofs. While acknowledging their architectural magnificence, more than one priest privately lamented to me that he wished that the planners would have had the foresight to choose a more subdued color scheme.

By the mid-1960s, the image of Sōjiji as an "international Zen garden" began to dominate the temple. Articles from *Chōryū* during the 1960s and 1970s show Sōjiji and its priests looking far beyond Japan, and actively engaged with the outside world on a truly international scale. Monthly reports from the overseas missions in California and South America are regularly seen alongside travelogues from Sōjiji priests who have recently returned from trips to Europe, China and India. Articles about how best to incorporate zazen into one's busy modern life are followed by commentary on international events like the conflict in Vietnam.

At the height of the bubble economy in the early 1980s, Sōjiji's interest in international affairs suddenly diminished. The temple administration turned inward: the needs of its Japanese parishioners began to take center stage, as did issues of sectarian identity and an academic interest in the unique contributions of Sōtō Zen to Japanese history. With the increased income stemming from decades of economic prosperity, more Japanese were in the financial position to indulge in pious conspicuous consumption. In addition to a rise in expensive household religious items like butsudan altars, Japanese parishioners were willing to pay for expensive traditional religious services which, owing to a variety of economic and demographic factors, simply had not been priorities previously. Sōjiji's focus shifted accordingly.

The shift was neither opportunistic nor greedy. Rather, it was the pragmatic choice. At the time there was more revenue to be made – and consequently, a better chance of keeping the temple financially solvent – by cultivating relationships with paying Japanese parishioners who could guarantee a multi-generational affiliation with

the temple than courting fickle international tourists. At the time, paying parishioners were, as the phrase goes, coming out of the woodwork.

However, when the economic bubble burst in 1992, Sōjiji found itself in a desperate situation. As with any recession, people were no longer able to afford to sponsor large funerals and memorial ceremonies, which had become a major source of temple revenue through donations. The problem was compounded by the fact that Sōjiji had, within a single decade, almost completely alienated itself from its previous international reputation. If guidebooks are any indication, by the year 2000 Sōjiji had fallen off the international tourist's map.

A Landscape of Discipline

On a cold and overcast day in February 2007, I was sitting alone in Sōjiji's Daisodō writing in my notebooks. It would be impossible – not to mention wasteful – for the temple to try to heat the massive space. As a result, the temperature inside the hall was the same as it was outside. I sat bundled in my winter coat and scarf.

The sheer enormity of the hall's interior was exaggerated in the cold, the darkness, and the silence of the empty space. I had seen only one person enter the hall in the hour I had been sitting there, and that person was gone as quickly as they came. The double pinch of incense that the visitor had offered dissipated slowly through the hall, lingering long after the visitor had left.

I sat uninterrupted for another hour, until the lights in the inner hall suddenly came on. A group of monks in work clothes emerged from the rear of the hall and began

to prepare the room for a ceremony: the hall was swept, candles were lit, the incense burner was cleaned, and a cushioned bowing mat and microphone were placed at the ready.

Half an hour later, the hall really began to come alive: a large reverberating bell rang out, signaling the community of monks to assemble in the hall. The black-robed novice monks slowly trickled into the hall over five minutes. Some moved more quickly than others, who were walking and talking with friends. They took a ready position on the perimeter of the hall.

With the ring of another bell, everything changed. The monks stood as a group, bowed, and moved into the inner hall with practiced, almost military, precision. A monk carrying a shoulder-mounted bell signaled the monks, as a group, to pull out and unfold their bowing mats from their sleeves. Another deep reverberating boom from the large bell in the hall signaled the start of the ceremony.

The ceremony was brief, but it was poetry in motion: with practiced movements, each of the participants in the ceremony performed their roles like moving parts in a well-oiled machine. The monks chanted in unison, their time and speed maintained by the steady beat of a large drum. The officiant moved toward the altar to offer incense when signaled by a bell, the signal itself perfectly timed to synchronize with the rhythm set by the drum. Another bell, and the monks began to ambulate around the hall, their feet moving in perfect precision. Several visitors entered the hall from the outside and sat down to watch the spectacle.

As the ceremony ended, the hall emptied quickly as the monks went back to their tasks elsewhere in Sōjiji. The candles were extinguished and the lights were turned off.

The hall, so warm and alive moments before was now as dark and silent as it had been before the ceremony.

While Sōjiji's Daisodō was constructed to be impressive and majestic – it is the largest of its kind in Japan – the disciplining and ordering power of the hall exists only in potential, to be unlocked and activated only through human activity and ritual performance. That is to say, the architecture of the Zen temple *suggests* activity, but its potential can only be tapped by human actors. A plot of soil may be fertile, but it is only a "garden" insofar as it is *made to be* a garden through human activity: tilling the soil, planting seeds, and carefully cultivating the growing plants. In other words, I came to see that it is not the architecture alone that makes a temple, but rather, how the architecture operates as a function of the people inside. Space may be disciplining, but without an object upon which to act, the space has no "purpose". This is true not only of the Daisodō, but of all the buildings in the entire temple complex.

In Japan, temples are distinguished according the specific religious function that they perform. Depending on the size of the temple and priests or other staff they employ, one temple can readily serve a number of functions, though it is common for smaller temples to focus their efforts.

The most common function for a Buddhist temple in Japan is as a *bodaiji*. A *bodaiji* typically specializes in funerary rites and mortuary rituals, performed on behalf of parishioner families for the benefit of their ancestors. The resident priest of a *bodaiji* is responsible for the regular and consistent performance of ritual observances for his parishioner's ancestors, as well as officiating at funeral and memorial services. A *bodaiji* will usually have a sizable cemetery on its property.

In contrast to the *bodaiji*, whose function is to care for the dead, are *kitōji*, or "prayer temples." A *kitōji* specializes in securing worldly benefits (*genze riyaku*) for the living through devotional and ritual performances. *Kitōji* are often associated with local folk beliefs dating back hundreds of years, and have gained a reputation over the centuries as being propitious sites for granting a person's wishes. While many *kitōji* allow for visitors to request the benefits they would like to receive, other temples are known for bestowing specific blessings such as protection in childbirth, or of ensuring a quick and easy death.

Shugyō Dōjō

As part of its many aspects, Sōjiji fulfills both of these functions. As a *bodaiji*, Sōjiji caters to the ritual needs of over five thousand parishioner families. As a *kitōji*, Sōjiji provides a religiously-charged setting for petitioners to ask for blessings from a number of powerful beings enshrined within Sōjiji's landscape. But these are secondary functions for Sōjiji.

Sōjiji's primary function is as a *shugyō dōjō*. A common translation of *shugyō dōjō* into English is as "training hall," but to rely on this gloss is to miss much of the force of the term. Unlike a *bodaiji* or *kitōji*, a *shugyō dōjō* does not have to be a temple, though it often is. One priest from a Sōjiji-affiliated temple in Yokohama told me that, in his opinion, a Zen temple is "any building where Zen is practiced. That is to say, any place where there is a master (*shiso*)." As long as there is a legitimately-ordained Sōtō

Zen teacher present to oversee the practice, it is a Zen temple, even though the outward form of the architecture differs by region and group.

The word *dōjō* has entered English through martial arts like judo and karate, referring to the room or hall where practitioners train and spar. Technically speaking, *any* space where an art or activity is pursued – from the martial arts, to the fine arts like flower arranging or tea ceremony – is called a *dōjō*. A *shugyō dōjō* is therefore a space where *shugyō* is performed.

Defining *shugyō* is a much trickier task. While *shūgyō* is often translated into English dictionaries as "training" or "ascetic discipline," it is a highly nuanced word as it is used in Japanese. The first character, *shu*, means "to practice or cultivate" (as in *osameru*), with the additional meaning of "correcting; to set in order". The second character, *gyō*, implies bodily movement (as in *iku*, to go) but also performance of an action (as in *okonau*). I will define *shugyō* as a bodily process by which a subject is mastered.

The Japanese use the term *shugyō* in a variety of contexts in contemporary society, especially settings where cultivating a self-discipline through hardship and self-denial over a long term is seen as the only road to future success. As Kondo (1990) observes, "in Japanese society generally, hardship is considered one pathway to a mature selfhood" (108). The impetus to self-discipline starts early, with children attending "cram schools" and working late into the night, as embodied by the cultural maxim "*yontō, goraku*": a person will succeed with four hours' sleep, but fail with five. In both sports and music, the many hours spent pushing the body and mind to exhaustion through repetition and drills are done in the name of *shugyō*. For business employees, long hours at the office

with little sleep or rest, with little social contact from family and friends is a form of *shugyō*. For many Japanese, *shugyō* in its religious context invokes imagery of cold water ablutions in frozen ponds, of thousand-day fasts, and of mortification of the flesh.

In every activity performed in the name of *shugyō*, an important slight-of-hand takes place. The "thing" being mastered – academics, baseball, flower arrangement – is a red herring: what is actually being mastered is the body performing the *shugyō*. Through *shugyō*, a person becomes, in Foucault's term, an "obedient subject" (1977: 128). The purpose of a *shugyō dōjō*, therefore, is to serve as a place whereby a subject is gradually transformed in both body and mind, their embodied selves and perception of reality made to conform to the ideal that the coercive pressure – as a manifestation of power – represents.

Put in these terms, the *shugyō dōjō* sounds like a place of violence. As an apparatus of corrective discipline, it certainly has that potential. However, the coercive pressure of *shugyō* is framed as compassionate, but ultimately impersonal: as a form of personal cultivation, *shugyō* is the only way by which living beings can better themselves, sloughing off the impurities and weaknesses that keep them from realizing their full potential as enlightened beings.

As we will see in the chapters that follow, enlightenment (*satori*) is not a far-off goal that one attains. Rather, the ideal state is one of perpetual *shugyō* – a constant "becoming" in which the disciplinary/cultivating forces are internalized and embodied. In Sōtō Zen, this is known as *shushō ittō*: "*shugyō* and enlightenment are one." *Shugyō* is not a means to an end, but rather the end itself.

For a Sōtō Zen temple, this religious ideal is codified in the figure of the *hotoke*. Like *shugyō*, *hotoke* is a multivalent term whose layers of cultural meaning run deep (Sasaki 1993). In its first meaning, *hotoke* refers to the historical Buddha Shakyamuni, the manifestation of the enlightened and perfected being, and whose teachings (*hotoke no oshie*) serve as a beacon for all who would escape the pain and suffering of the world.

Hotoke took on additional meaning during Japan's medieval period, as funerals such as those performed by Sōtō Zen priests promised immediate enlightenment, and thus salvation, for the deceased. The phrase "*hotoke ni naru*" (or its alternate, *jōbutsu*) – "to become a *hotoke*" – soon became a euphemism for death in the Japanese popular imagination. As such, a person who has recently died is referred to as a *hotoke*, though as we will see, even the dead are not spared the disciplining/cultivating power of *shugyō*.

By extension, a *hotoke* can refer to any being which has awoken to the truth of the Buddha's enlightenment. Contrasted with the ranks of deceased *hotoke*, the term *ikibotoke* – "living *hotoke*" – refers to any being whose disciplined and graceful actions reveal the wisdom of an enlightened mind. *Ikibotoke* are paragons, living models of the Buddha's teachings. They are reminders that enlightenment is attainable in this life by careful cultivation of one's body and mind: in the words of one Sōjiji priest, "in whatever we do, we must remember that we *are* hotoke, not that we *will be* hotoke."

The central argument of this work can be stated thus: **a Sōtō Zen temple is a site for the cultivation of *hotoke* through the practice of *shugyō*.**

Outline

My field research was conducted primarily at Sōjiji, with comparative data gathered through visits and interviews throughout Japan between August 2006 and April 2008. I took a two-pronged approach to understanding the community which participates in the daily life of Sōjiji, treating the experiences of the resident monastics and those of the laity who visit the temple as two poles on a continuum of religious engagement. I regularly attended temple functions and other events, and active participation as a member of the temple's various lay organizations allowed me to share in the experiences of many of the lay participants of Sōjiji. It was this commonality of experience that encouraged many of my informants to share, in formal and informal interviews, their personal motivations and experiences of their practice.

My daily visits to the temple and participation in public ceremonies made me a familiar face to both the temple administration and novice monks. Likewise, my familiarity with the protocol and expectations of Japanese Zen temple life helped to build rapport and trust between myself and my informants. Though limited at first, as my research progressed, I was allowed to move with increasing freedom across the explicit spatial and conversational boundaries that distinguish the clergy from the laity.

By highlighting Sōjiji's role as a *shugyō dōjō*, I intend to show in the chapters that follow how the people who make up the religious community of Sōjiji create meaning in their own lives through participation in the daily life of the temple, through their interactions with other members of the temple community in both formal (ritual) and informal (everyday) contexts, and through their experiences of the physical and temporal

landscape of the temple itself. Questions of performance, experience and practice shaped my ethnographic inquiry into everyday life at Sōjiji. At the most basic level, I was interested in how participants understand, experience, and negotiate their own practice and how they represent this practice to others. I paid particular attention to the ways in which practitioners spoke about the motivations and experiences that led them to Sōjiji.

While Sōjiji is open to the public, I argue that the majority of visitors initially come to the temple out of an interest in the transformative properties of *shugyō*. Some will come out of curiosity, others from hearing of the abstract benefits of incorporating "Zen" into their lives. Perhaps the most common, however, are people who come during periods of personal crisis and transition. This transition is in many ways a "death" of the former social person, as an individual moves from one social identity into another. In some cases this is a metaphorical death, such as a divorce, a retirement, or a "leaving the world" to enter the ranks of the clergy. In others it is in preparation or response to the literal death of a family member, friend or even oneself. The temple provides a site for the gradual process of disciplining by which people negotiate a new social identity for themselves under greatly different social circumstances.

In Chapter 2, I begin with the training of the novice monks – known as *unsui* – who live at Sōjiji. The daily life of a Sōtō Zen monk at Sōjiji is highly regimented, as well as physically and emotionally taxing. Transitioning into this life of tradition and discipline is often stressful for the young monks, most of whom are recent college graduates who did not choose the clerical lifestyle for themselves, but are pressured to carry on the "family business" of their fathers. However, in the disciplining environment

of the Monk's Hall, the *unsui* are remade from soft, resistant novices into living embodiments of Sōtō Zen teachings.

Chapter 3 continues the story of the unsui, as they transition to become fully ordained Sōtō Zen priests. After so much intense training, the newly-minted priests "graduate" from Sōjiji into a world outside of their monastic discipline, and are forced almost immediately to start making ends meet. This transition to their new social lives often leads to crises of identity and faith as the priests must learn reconcile their public image as "enlightened beings" with their worldly responsibilities and human shortcomings.

The fourth chapter, *Sanzen*, bridges the discussion of the clergy with the discussion of the laity by presenting the Sanzenkai, a lay organization that sees its meditative practice at Sōjiji as combining the very best of both worlds. The Sanzenkai represent some of the most assiduous and devoted Zen practitioners, but are the least likely to participate in the religious life of Sōjiji. Their belief in a "pure Zen" represented by their meditative practice often puts them at odds with Sōjiji's goals as a religious institution.

In Chapter 5, I discuss a group called the Baikakō, a musical group that meets regularly at Sōjiji to sing a type of Buddhist religious music known as *goeika*. The Baikakō is comprised primarily of elderly women and stresses practice over performance as a means of cultivating oneself through music and finding harmony in one's life. For many of the members, *goeika* practice is also a way of addressing the increasing awareness of their own mortality, and the separation and loss brought on by the death of spouses, loved ones, and friends.

In the final chapter, *Kuyō*, I argue that funerals and memorial rites sponsored by parishioner families on behalf of their ancestors are not "passive" performances. Rather, performing *kuyō* for one's loved ones and ancestors follows the logic of *shugyō*, cultivating new life from death, and guiding both the living and dead to enlightenment.

Rather than present a "guidebook approach" to Sōjiji and its environs, I have chosen to illustrate Sōjiji in relief, showing the spaces of the temple through the human activity taking place within. The intended effect is like lightning illuminating a dark landscape: momentary and fleeting glimpses that hint at an enormity that lies concealed. And Sōjiji is an enormity: there is no way that a work of this scope could ever be comprehensive in respect to Sōjiji's size, grandeur, history, or cultural impact. Instead, I present a picture of Sōjiji as experienced by those few people – myself included – in whose stories I had the honor of hearing, recording, and participating.

Ultimately, I believe that Sōjiji is the fully-realized manifestation of its founder's vision. Today, as it was seven centuries ago, Sōjiji is a fertile soil, worked and tilled by millions of people over countless generations. As a person enters Sōjiji's gate, a seed is planted. In the pages that follow, I will to demonstrate how different individuals cultivate these seeds. When they leave the temple, they will reenter the social world greatly transformed.

Chapter II

Unsui

"Shintō, yoroshu!"

In the Kantō region of Japan, late March brings the much-awaited blooming of the cherry blossom trees. Nature is at times difficult to find in the landscape of concrete that dominates Tokyo and Yokohama, but for the two weeks or so that the cherry blossoms are in bloom, city-dwellers by the tens of thousands seek out parks and other oases of greenery to take part in *hanami*, or flower viewing. The weather is fair and the sun is warm – it is a wonderful time to be outside.

On the lawn outside the Daisodō, Sōjiji's cherry blossom trees are in full bloom. These trees are only recent additions to the temple landscape, and there are not many of them – like much of Sōjiji's flora, they were planted in 1999 – but on this particular morning they nevertheless provide a pleasant setting for a group of co-eds from Tsurumi University to have a small *hanami* gathering under a canopy of brilliant white blossoms. Like the thousands of similar gatherings taking place only forty minutes north in Ueno Park, these students have claimed their *hanami* spot early with a waterproof blue tarp, though there is not much competition for space here. They intend to make a day of it, having brought plenty of food to eat, and plenty of alcohol to drink. Several in the group

will be graduating in less than three weeks, and today will make for a splendid last hurrah for this circle of friends. The students lounge on the tarp, some sitting, some reclining, their voices and laughter carrying throughout the temple precincts.

Not fifty yards away, but seemingly a world apart, five young monks are standing in nervous silence outside the entrance of the Taihōkan, the Hall of the Waiting Phoenix. On one of the pillars supporting the ornately-carved archway hangs a wooden board, called a *monpan*, with a wooden hammer suspended by a rope from the bottom. A large indentation has been worn into the center of the board, a testament to the thousands of times that the hammer has struck the wood to produce the *monpan*'s characteristic hollow sound. Striking the *monpan* is a signal that a monk has arrived at the temple gates seeking permission to join the temple community. On most days of the year, the *monpan* does not hang here. These past few weeks, however, are different: these five monks are only a handful of the seventy-five novices who will begin their training this spring, and today the wooden board has been hung outside in anticipation of their arrival.

The monks are wearing their long black robes in the traditional manner of a wandering mendicant; the bottom of their robe is bustled into their rope belts to facilitate movement, exposing the hem of their underrobes. On their bare feet they wear rough straw sandals called *waraji*, laced on their ankles. Running the length of their forearms is a white sleeve which extends over the back of the hand. Draped over their left shoulders is a bib-like garment called a *rakusu*, a utilitarian version of a *kesa*, the long ceremonial robe which identifies them as disciples of the Buddha. Over both shoulders they carry a kind of rucksack fashioned from two boxes secured together with a long cloth strap; one box is carried on their backs, the other on their chests. Inside these boxes are carefully

packed a change of robes and undergarments, their *kesa*, a set of lacquered eating bowls, and a small scroll containing an image of the Dragon God, guardian of Buddhist monks. Tucked under their left arms is the black cushion called a *zafu* that they will use every day for zazen; in their right hands, they hold their wide-brimmed straw hats like shields. They carry no money save for a five-thousand yen bill which will be donated to the temple as "nirvana money" (*nehankin*), used to pay for the monk's funeral should he die in training. This is all that a novice monk is allowed to bring with him as he begins his training at Sōjiji. Everything else, all other trappings of his former life, is forbidden.

One of the monks steps forward and removes the hammer hanging from the loop of rope on the bottom of the *monpan*. He takes the rope in his hand. Slowly and deliberately, he strikes the center of the board three times with the hammer; the sharp crack of wood on wood resonates into the empty hall. He replaces the hammer into the loop after the third strike, and then places his hands together, with his fingertips at the level of his nose. In his loudest voice, he bellows, "*Shintō, yoroshu!*" ("New arrivals!")

They wait. Not one of them dares to move or even fidget, nor do they speak to each other. The nervous monks are aware that they are being tested, and they are anxious to not make any mistakes. In their heads, they are likely going over all that they have been told to remember: how to compose themselves, how to answer to their superiors, how to open their bowls before meals. Perhaps they are grateful for the warm spring sun, knowing that while they stand here, other new arrivals like themselves are being made to stand in freezing rain or even snow outside of monastery gates in regions of Japan where the spring is still months away. Hearing the laughter of the students at their *hanami* party

across the garden, perhaps these young monks are wishing they were somewhere, anywhere else.

For the young monks, the minutes spent waiting must seem an eternity. Eventually, the gatekeeper emerges at the top of the stairs leading into the hall, wielding a thick wooden stick like a sword. In a stern, quiet tone, he demands to know why the monks have shown up at Sōjiji's gate. "[We have come] to pay respects to the founder of this temple, and to enter the temple to train[1] here," (*Gokaisan haitō, narabi ni menkata, yoroshu!*) one monk shouts in reply. The gatekeeper warns the new monks that life at Sōjiji is not for those who have any attachment to themselves or those who have any doubts about why they are here. "You cannot enter here, go somewhere else," he says before he turns his back on the waiting monks. "Go home!"

The young monks do not budge. "Didn't you hear me? I said go home!," he shouts at them. This, too, is part of the test: previous generations of monks were made to stand for hours or even days on end to prove that they possessed the deep commitment necessary for training at Sōjiji, under the reasoning that those who lacked either self-discipline or a sincere desire to live the monastic lifestyle would simply give up and walk away after being rejected. Over the years, the time that new arrivals are made to stand in front of the gate has gradually been whittled down to about two hours, or half an hour if the weather is bad.

In the same low voice as before, he repeats his warning that the *hotoke no michi* – the path of the Buddha – is a difficult road to walk. He asks each new arrival if they are prepared for what awaits them inside the temple gates. Without hesitating, each monk

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[1] *Menkata* means to "hang up one's staff". This refers to the old practice in which a traveling monk would hang up his walking stick when he found the temple in which he would cloister himself for a period of time. As this is no longer practiced, *menkata* has come to refer to the act of entering a temple for *shugyō*.

shouts, "*Hai!*" They are led into the hall, where one by one they step out of their traveler's sandals and into their new lives as Sōjiji monks.

Ascending the Mountain

The act of entering into the community of a Sōtō Zen training monastery is sometimes referred to as *nyūmon* ("entering the gate"), but among the monks themselves, it is called *jōzan* ("ascending the mountain"). As discussed in chapter 1, mountains, like forests, are very important symbols in a Zen temple: calling a temple a "mountain", regardless of its actual topography, invokes the classical Chinese ideal of a hermitage located on a secluded and hard to reach mountaintop, far removed from the secular world. While very few temples in Japan are actually on secluded mountains – Sōjiji is located on a hill in the middle of a busy city – the custom of giving "mountain names" to Buddhist temples continues today. If a temple is a mountain, then those who are entering the temple community for the purpose of *shugyō* are climbing it.

Just as the temple is an idealized mountain, the clothing worn and rituals performed by the new monks who are entering the monastery frame them as idealized wandering mendicants, or *unsui* (lit. "clouds and water"). The word unsui refers to the transient life of a Buddhist monk, who is beholden to "move like clouds and flow like water" (*kōun ryūsui*), never staying in one temple or place for long, always in search of new teachers to deepen their understanding of Buddhist teachings. The image of the wandering unsui in his straw sandals, wide brimmed hat and walking staff has been

represented for centuries in Japanese literature and art, and even today finds life in Japanese popular imagery.

Like all idealized images, there is a bit of fiction involved in the figure of the unsui: as far as anyone at the temple could tell me, it has been years since a new monk arrived at the temple after having journeyed for days on foot over mountain and river. Rather, nearly all new arrivals have traveled by train or by car from their homes to Sōjiji, often accompanied by parents, relatives, and friends. Some even decide to forgo the traditional traveling bags worn over their chest and back for a cloth-tied bundle held in their hands, or in one case I saw, simply a duffle bag.

Likewise, the objects that the unsui carry on their person are not actually the only things they will need during their time at Sōjiji. Weeks before their arrival at the temple, prospective monks receive a checklist of all the items they should have: toiletries, school supplies such as notebooks and pens, a seasonal change of robes, bedding of *futon* and blankets, and plastic shelving units to hold the materials that they will acquire over the course of their *shugyō*. These bulky items have been sent ahead by special delivery service to Sōjiji, and are already waiting for the new monk when he arrives at the temple.

The *jōzan* ritual itself, with all of the waiting and shouting, is recognized by everyone involved as little more than a formality. The unsui know they will be made to wait for several hours, that the gatekeeper will first reject them, and that they will ultimately be admitted into the temple. No one I asked could remember a single instance of an applicant "failing" this test and being sent home. The application for an unsui to train at Sōjiji has been submitted and approved months before the new monk arrives at Sōjiji's gate. Indeed, one could make a very strong argument that these new monks who

are "ascending the mountain" are less like the traveling monastics of history and legend than they are like freshmen arriving at college for the first time.

Why, then, bother going through with all of the formalities? The short answer is that it is for the sake of continuity. By participating in the *jōzan* ritual, a newly-arrived monk is playing a role in a narrative that is said to originate in the earliest days of the Buddhism in India, when monks would congregate in forest retreats to live a communal life during the rainy season when traveling was impossible. The modern day unsui is repeatedly told that they are the most recent link in an unbroken chain of tradition that extends back over thousands of miles and two and a half millennia.

The long answer, I will argue in this chapter, lies in the importance of the idealized figure of the unsui himself: over the next year, the image of the unsi will be invoked time and again in the effort of instilling in the young clergy a sense of being guardians of an unbroken continuity and defenders of the sectarian tradition which maintains it. More to the point, this idealized image of the unsui will be the impossible standard to which all of the new monks will be held. Over the course of his *shugyō* at Sōjiji, a monk will be refashioned very literally from the ground up, transformed from an undisciplined body into a living example of Sōtō Zen teachings, traditions and practices. From their old selves, they will be reborn through their *shugyō* as embodiments of enlightened practice.

A Portrait of the Monk as a Young Man

Wakamatsu is twenty-two years old when he arrives at Sōjiji, having just graduated from college only weeks prior. He is taller than most of the young monks by about a head, but like a good many of his fellow new arrivals, his frame carries the plumpness of an easy, mostly sedentary, life.

Wakamatsu is a "temple son" (*tera no musuko*) and an only child. Unlike many Japanese of his age, Buddhism and religion has always played a significant role his life. At his home temple, his grandfather is the nominal abbot, but he has relegated the majority of his responsibilities to Wakamatsu's father, the assistant abbot. Wakamatsu grew up watching his father and grandfather perform their ceremonial duties, and he had many opportunities to observe them interact with their parishioners. As there were two priests already in the house, it was not necessary for Wakamatsu to take the tonsure until recently, which he did as a matter of course prior to his application to Sōjiji.

His mother and father had driven eight hours from their family temple in northwest Japan to bring him to Tsurumi. Before they said goodbye for the last time, the family stopped to take pictures of their son dressed in his monastic garb standing under Sōjiji's large *sanmon* gate. Like his son, Wakamatsu's father had performed *shugyō* at Sōjiji almost thirty years earlier. As the family poses for pictures, Wakamatsu's father gestures around the temple ground, describing all of changes to the landscape that had taken place since he had been there.

Wakamatsu always knew that he would be a Sōtō Zen priest. Like many of the training monks, he attended Komazawa University, a Sōtō Zen-affiliated university in

Tokyo, where he majored in Buddhist Studies. His choice of majors was not due to any particular draw to or affinity with Zen or Buddhism. Rather, he was following a well-paved path that many in the Sōtō clergy had tread before him: according to sectarian regulations, he could finish his required training at Sōjiji in as little as six months, half the time it would take a university graduate with no background in Buddhism, and a quarter of the time required of monks with only a high school education. Wakamatsu was not alone in his assumption that the faster he got through his *shugyō* at Sōjiji, the faster he could start the rest of his life as a fully-ordained priest at his family's rural temple.

Nakajima arrived at Sōjiji within a few days of Wakamatsu. Of average height and weight, Nakajima would have been nearly indistinguishable from the other monks save for his prominent ears, which stuck out proudly from his shaved head. His thick black-rimmed glasses were likewise standard issue for unsui who need them, further muting his individuality.

Like Wakamatsu, Nakajima knew that he had a ready-made career as a priest if he wanted it, but he had dreams of being a computer programmer. Even though he would have received reduced tuition at Komazawa University, he had chosen to attend a private college where he could acquire the skills to design the racing simulator video games that he loved to play. As a second son, his older brother – already a fully ordained priest – was in line to inherit the family temple, and so Nakajima's parents were perhaps more willing to indulge their younger son's aspirations.

However, computer programming in Japan is a tough business. Competition for the few jobs there are is cutthroat, and if a programmer does manage to find a job, he is rewarded with long hours, difficult deadlines, few benefits, and high turnover. After

failing to secure a post-graduation job during his senior year, and faced with looming graduation and unemployment, Nakajima became discouraged and concerned for his future. He went to his parents for advice.

His parents were supportive, but his father suggested that, in lieu of a career in programming, he should think about becoming a priest. If he was diligent and patient, he could work within the Sōtō Zen sectarian administration in the hopes of one day being rewarded for his efforts with a temple of his own. At first, Nakajima resisted, but he gradually began to warm to the idea. In a blur, Nakajima received tonsure from his father, and his paperwork and applications were rushed so that he could enter a Sōtō training temple immediately after graduation. His father had performed his required *shugyō* at Eiheiji, but he was concerned that a monk's life at Eiheiji would be too severe for his son who was only beginning to come to grips with his new vocation. In the end, Nakajima says, it was a toss-up between Sōjiji and a small regional training temple with only a handful of monks. As he would later admit, Nakajima chose Sōjiji in hopes that there would be safety in numbers which would allow him to get through his *shugyō* without being singled out for mistakes.

Biographies like Wakamatsu and Nakajima's are relatively common among each new crop of unsui who come to Sōjiji. For the majority of new unsui, pressure to inherit the family temple has long made a career in the priesthood a foregone conclusion. Indeed, my informants in the temple administration cited sectarian surveys which report that temple sons comprise more than eighty percent of Zen clergy, with the other twenty percent entering the priesthood out of a variety of personal motivations.[2] Statistically, this

[2] Ian Reader (1991) reports the same number in his discussion of temple families, leading me to conclude that my informants were citing the same sect-sponsored survey.

would mean that fifteen of the entering cohort of seventy-five unsui should come from family backgrounds other than clerical families.

By virtue of their family background, most of the new unsui at Sōjiji are already somewhat familiar with the texts and protocol of daily life at a Sōtō Zen temple. The depth of this background, however, varies from individual to individual: one unsui who took tonsure at the age of thirteen to assist his father in daily ritual life will have substantially more of a foundation in temple life than another temple son (like Wakamatsu and Nakajima) who received the tonsure just prior to entering Sōjiji. Similarly, temple sons are almost guaranteed to have more familiarity with temple life than a layperson who takes the tonsure out of personal religious commitment. Experience translates into real advantage: the more exposure an unsui has to the ins-and-outs of daily life at a Sōtō temple, the smoother their acclimation will be into the disciplined life of *shugyō* at Sōjiji.

If one were to sketch out an "average" unsui at Sōjiji, both Wakamatsu and Nakajima would come very close to the description. In 2007, the ages of the incoming unsui ranged from eighteen to forty-three, with the majority being between twenty-two or twenty-three years old. With the exception of several unsui who held only a high school diploma, virtually all of the incoming unsui were college graduates, most commonly graduating from the two Sōtō-affiliated universities, Komazawa and Aichi Gakuin. Between eighty (my informants' estimate) and ninety percent (my estimate) of the unsui are sons of temple priests. Although non-Japanese are permitted to train at Sōjiji (provided they have a suitable familiarity with the Japanese language), they have

typically been few and far between: the last foreign national – a Brazilian – trained at the temple in 2000.

Most significantly, if not readily apparent, all unsui at Sōjiji are male. Women play an active role in the daily operations of Sōjiji, and female monastics are not uncommon visitors to the temple.[3] However, only men are allowed to train as unsui at Sōjiji, with women relegated largely to support roles, such as working in the gift shop or kitchens.

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of the young unsui who come to train at Sōjiji have no aspirations towards spiritual awakening or religious enlightenment. Very few of them express a sentiment of having a "calling" in the sense that the term has been used in the Christian monastic tradition. It is important to remember that the decision to enter the monastic life was in most cases not theirs to make: as Covell (2005) describes, temple families that cannot produce an heir either by birth or adoption, or those who have a son who chooses a vocation other than the priesthood are commonly forced out of their temples by their parishioners. Financial realities and the need for a suitable successor mean that temple families often cannot afford to indulge their sons' dreams of a life outside of the priesthood. This is especially true if he is the eldest son of the family: Nakajima was fortunate to have an older brother who was already being groomed for succession, but it is very doubtful that his older brother was given the same opportunities as his younger sibling to choose his own future.

The most uncommon unsui is the one who comes of his own volition to the monastic lifestyle, as opposed to the one who merely comes to terms with it. In this regard, for many temple sons, the act of following in their father's footsteps to become a

[3] Arai (1999) discusses the female monastics' perspectives on the role of women in the Sōtō Zen priesthood.

Sōtō priest is treated in the best of circumstances as a convenient eventuality: these unsui describe being fortunate that they have a certain measure of job security in rough economic times. For others, the pressure to take over the difficult and often unrewarding "family business" can feel like an inescapable prison: having absolutely no personal interest in a life of religious obligation, these unsui enter into their *shugyō* harboring feelings of resentment and, on occasion, with open animosity.

In this regard, it is not an exaggeration to say that nearly all of the incoming unsui who feel a deeper, personal connection to the teachings of Sōtō Zen and the lifestyle of a Buddhist clergyman come from non-clerical backgrounds. Being free from the financial or filial obligations that would have pressured them into the priesthood, these unsui had the freedom to make life choices and have experiences that are often not available to temple sons. These unsui are typically older than the average entrant, having spent years working in an office, working towards graduate degrees, raising a family, or traveling. In the majority of cases, their interest in Zen derives from years of regular zazen practice in temple settings, often accompanied by an appetite for books about Zen.

It is significant that, despite the relative freedom of choice that brought them to Sōjiji, monks with non-clerical family backgrounds often report being led to Zen practice through a sense of dissatisfaction with one or more aspects of their secular lives. One priest I met at Sōjiji described dropping out of a doctoral program at a prestigious university mere months before he was scheduled to graduate when he had the sudden thought that if he graduated, he would forever lose the chance to live as a Zen monk. He scheduled a meeting to tell his advisor of his decision, but before he could speak, his advisor offered him a comfortable university teaching position. He saw the offer as a trial

of religious significance: "When he offered me that job, I felt as if I was being tested by Maya and Mara."[4] He refused the position, announced his decision to leave academia, and made directly for the temple where he regularly sat zazen to be tonsured.

Another new monk was employed at a law firm, in which he was growing increasingly unhappy as a result of overwork and a feeling that he was being "bullied" by his over-critical superiors. He began practicing zazen as a way of dealing with the pressures of his job, but he found himself fantasizing about abandoning it all for a monastic life. When he finally quit his job, he made arrangements to receive tonsure and to enter the Sōtō priesthood. Other monks report that it was being laid off due to company downsizing or coping with the aftermath of a divorce that led them to pursue a life in the clergy.

The seventy-five unsui who arrived at Sōjiji in 2007 come from twenty-five of the forty-seven prefectures of Japan, with the majority from the main island of Honshū. Of these, nearly half come from the Kantō Region, the area which includes the Tokyo Metropolitan Prefecture and Kanagawa Prefecture (Yokohama), with all but a handful of the remainder coming from the northern half of Honshū, where Sōtō Zen traditionally has had a deep foothold of parishioner support.

A prospective Sōtō Zen priest has several options for where he can perform his *shugyō*. In addition to Sōjiji or Eiheiji, a monk can choose from a network of smaller, regional training temples where there are fewer unsui (some with as little as ten training monks) and where practice is more intimate.

[4] In the Buddhist mythos, these are the demons who tried in vain to tempt the as-yet unenlightened Buddha to abandon his meditation with illusions of worldly riches and power and the pleasures of the flesh

Since over ninety percent of Sōtō Zen branch temples are nominally affiliated with Sōjiji, one might assume that Sōjiji would get the bulk of the new initiates. This, however, is not the case: *shugyō* at Eiheiji has the reputation for being more strict and demanding, and training there carries a level of personal and social prestige both within the sect and among one's parishioners that training at Sōjiji currently does not match. Enrollment at Sōjiji has steadily declined over the past several decades while Eiheiji's numbers have swelled to over two hundred entrants per year.

An unsui at Sōjiji often has a ready answer to the question as to why they chose Sōjiji over Eiheiji. In many cases, doing one's *shugyō* at Sōjiji has become a family legacy: two or three generations of a monk's family may have trained at Sōjiji. Others choose Sōjiji, as Nakajima did, for the simple reason that Sōjiji does not have the reputation for being as strict or harsh that Eiheiji or a smaller temple has. One monk told me that since his temple's rituals historically have more in common with Sōjiji's than Eiheiji, he thought that it would be a smoother transition for him. Some monks described wanting to be closer to a big city, and one admitted that he chose Sōjiji because the weather was less extreme in Tsurumi than in Fukui Prefecture, where Eiheiji is located.

Debates between which temple's training is stricter, which practices are more authentic, or which monastic lifestyle is more demanding remain a constant source of open rivalry between the two *honzan*. However, a quantifiable difference between Sōjiji and Eiheiji is that Sōjiji ministers to over five thousand parishioner families. Eiheiji, in contrast, has none, catering mainly to the tourists who visit the temple by the busload. The responsibilities and lessons that an unsui is exposed to during his time at either temple are thus dramatically different, with training at Sōjiji providing on-the-job training

for clergy whose future ability to make ends meet will greatly depend on their skill in single-handedly catering to the needs of hundreds of parishioner families.

Leaving Home

For many Japanese youths, the college years are remembered fondly as a time of freedom and socially-acceptable irresponsibility sandwiched between the stresses of high school and the responsibilities of adulthood. Graduation from college usually brings an abrupt end to these freedoms, and pressure to find post-graduate employment is high. Across the country, students in their final year of college attend job fairs by the thousands in matching uniforms of black suits and white shirts, many hoping to find a secure job that will keep them employed until retirement.

One consequence of the lasting economic recession in Japan that has stalled the country's economy since 1991 has been that many companies no longer have the resources to hire recent graduates and still guarantee support for the workers who have faithfully served them for decades. As companies elect to stand behind their long-term employees, fewer and fewer jobs become available to recent graduates. The Japanese labor market is predicated upon hiring of recent graduates, meaning that those who miss their chance to find employment when they leave college discover that their chances of finding a long-term job drop off precipitously one year after graduation, and steadily decline every year thereafter (Genda 2005: 60).

Recent worldwide economic crises have only exacerbated the problem, and increasing numbers of college-educated adults in Japan are falling into a downward spiral

of serial short-term employment that is neither personally fulfilling nor financially secure. One result is that a growing number of college graduates enter into an extended period of living at home, and a renewed dependency on their parents for food and money.

The unsui are spared the anxiety of the post-graduate job search (though, as will be discussed in the next chapter, they will have a different set of financial worries). However, what they might gain in a sense of future job security is countered in the short term by the very real personal sacrifices and austerities required of *shugyō* in a Sōtō Zen training temple. For many new monks, the sacrifices are involuntary at best, made all the more painful in light of the recent memories of their former identities. Only weeks earlier, these young men were seniors in college. They styled their hair, wore jeans, ate meat, drank alcohol, hung out with their friends, listened to music, watched movies, played games, and went on dates. As they stand at the gates of Sōjiji, all this is behind them now. They are expected to leave behind the lay trappings of their former lives and embrace their new identities as Sōtō Zen clergymen.

In this regard, the weeks leading up to their arrival at Sōjiji will be among the most jarring and life-changing of a young monk's life. The transition from lay life into his new identity as a Sōtō Zen monk begins several weeks before the actual arrival, when the unsui receives tonsure from an ordained Sōtō Zen priest. The officiating priest is most often his father or close male relative. The tonsure ceremony, known as *shukke tokudo* ("leaving home"), is considered to be the first step along the Buddhist path. As is common in initiation rites, *shukke tokudo* visibly marks the initiate's body to communicate that the initiate's former social identity has died as a member of Japanese

society, and has been transformed into a liminal status as world renouncer and a disciple of the Buddha.

In previous times, the concept of leaving home had a much greater social significance than it has today. A literal translation for the term *shukke* is "home leaver", meaning one who has given up their families, houses and property for a life of mendicant transience. In Buddhist practice in local contexts throughout Asia, this status is nearly always contrasted with "householder" (*zaike* in Japanese), a general category for all non-monastic laity.

Prior to the modern era in Japan, "leaving home" was literal: an initiate who had been tonsured through *shukke tokudo* was struck from the household register of his lay family. From a legal and societal perspective, the act of being struck from the household register literally "unmade" a person. A person who did not appear on a household register was outside the law and outside established social order. All rights to property, title, and caste were taken away. While he lived, there would be no record of his having been born; when he died, there would be no record of his death for future generations to venerate him as an ancestor. For the unfortunate outcaste, it would be as if he had never existed.

For a layperson, being removed from one's family record was a punishment available to secular or religious authorities as a form of "social execution" which rendered the subject an outcast and a non-person in this life, and doomed him to be a wandering, hungry ghost in the next. The monastic, however, was saved from this fate by having his social identity and personhood reconstituted by being added to the temple register of the priest who tonsured him and to the clerical register (*sōseki*) kept at the head temple of his sect. By transmitting the tonsure and administering the Buddhist

precepts, the tonsuring priest became an initiate's master (*shisō*) and "Dharma father". The ritual of tonsure therefore became a birth of a new social person into a family understood through participation in a "Dharma lineage" (*hōkei*); that is, a system of descent predicated upon the transmission of teachings passed down from one generation to the next, and which are believed to originate in the Buddha Shakyamuni, who sits as the apical ancestor.

Prior to the twentieth century, "leaving home" made it possible for a Buddhist clergyman to disappear from the obligations and responsibilities of their former social identities. Today, however, the particularities of Japanese history and Buddhist doctrine collide in the *shukke tokudo* ceremony. By and large the majority of these ceremonies are performed in Sōtō Zen temples at which the initiate's father – biological, adoptive or in-law – is resident abbot. Indeed, the very idea of "home leaving" is put to the test for monastics in modern Japan: unlike former times, an initiate is not struck from the household register when he is added to the temple register of the tonsuring priest. In effect, the erstwhile "home leaver" today actually *gains* a family, as well as the social and ritual obligations owed to both the ancestors and living members of each. For a temple son, the family he gains is, for the most part, the family he started with. For the twenty or so percent of Sōtō clergy who come from lay families, however, they immediately gain generations of Dharma parents and grandparents, Dharma siblings, and Dharma cousins.

For all its implications, the Sōtō Zen *shukke tokudo* ceremony is itself brief and intimate. The tonsuring priest shaves the initiate's head to symbolize his "casting off of the worldly life". The initiate then receives a set of black robes. After he puts on these robes, the last lock of hair – symbolizing his final attachment to his former self – will be

shaven from his head. To mark his transformation into his new social identity, the initiate is given a new name. This name is known in the Japanese Zen sects as *anmyō* (refuge name) but, more broadly in Japanese Buddhism, as *hōmyō* (Dharma name), consists of three parts, of which the second part will act as a new personal name for the initiate (Sargent 2001: 130; Matusmoto 1994: 50).

After receiving his Dharma robe (*kesa*), bowing mat and eating bowls from the tonsuring priest, the initiate formally takes refuge in the Three Jewels and vows to uphold the Three Pure Precepts and the Ten Prohibitions. Finally, his master presents him with a *kechimyaku,* a lineage chart that places the initiate – now known by his new *anmyō* – into a single, unbroken line of descent that begins with the historical Buddha, Shakyamuni, and continues through generations of master-disciple relationships to the current master and the new initiate. The line becomes a closed circle when a line is drawn from the initiate to Shakyamuni, essentially showing the initiate to be the teacher of the Buddha himself.

The ostensible cutting of the worldly ties of one's former life and the receiving of a new name is in every way a "birthing" of the initiate into a new world of social relationships and filial responsibilities as a Sōtō Zen priest. Over the course of the ceremony, the master's actions are meant to replicate the idealized nurturing of the birth family: the master clothes the initiate, names him, and finally, provides him with the means to feed and sustain himself. Despite its brief duration, the *shukke tokudo* rite establishes the foundation for the relationship of filial indebtedness and obligation (*on*) that the initiate is beholden to honor for the rest of his life.[5] By being provided a new Dharma name and a lineage chart, the initiate is given the means to reorient his new

[5] See Benedict 1984 [1946]: 98-113

identity to the family to which he now belongs and by extension, the parents and ancestors to which his bonds of obligation must be repaid (*hōon*).

Following the ceremony, the initiate's refuge name and the details of the initiation will be registered with the administrative offices of the Sōtō Zen sect. The initiate now has two names, a secular name and a Dharma name, both of which have significance for him. Today, a member of the clergy will keep their Japanese family name, but may legally change their personal name to their new Dharma name. For many temple sons, this is an easy transition on paper: practical-minded parents will often give their sons a Japanese personal name written using characters whose pronunciation can be easily changed so that the written name will stay the same even after he is given a "new" name during his initiation.[6]

However, even if an unsui has a conveniently transferable written name, he will most likely grow into adolescence using the Japanese pronunciation of his personal name. In my conversations with the unsui, several expressed an inability to relate to their new name, and by extension, their new Buddhist identity. While it may be that the attachment to their former names is often difficult to break, it may also be the case that the symbolic significance of receiving an *anmyō* no longer carries the force that it once did. One unsui casually revealed to me that his Dharma name had very little significance to him. "Truth is, I don't have any connection with my new name," he told me. "For twenty-two years, my name has been Masao. Now I'm Shōyū." He shrugs. "It really doesn't mean anything

[6] Most Japanese names use the *kun-yomi* or "Japanese reading" for the Chinese characters used to write them. Buddhist names, in contrast, often use the *on-yomi* or "Chinese reading" of the characters. In this way, the characters that make up a person's name can be preserved even after the pronunciation is changed, an impossibility in alphabetic languages.

to me." Another new arrival I spoke with had to look at his name tag to remember what he was supposed to be called.

After the *tokudo* and registration with the Sōtō Zen sect central administration, the new initiate has ten years to become a formally ordained priest. The requirement is that the initiate spend between six months and two years in *shugyō* (depending on highest level of education attained) at a certified training monastery. As this period of *shugyō* is the only thing standing in the way of their full ordination, most new initiates will aim to get this part done with as soon as possible after their tonsure.

Prior to the modern period, governmental edicts prevented a monk from receiving full clerical ordination until they could prove that they had spent twenty years in *shugyō* (Nodomi 2007: 5). Today, unsui arriving at Sōjiji's gates have had scant weeks to come to grip with the realities of their new social status and public identities. While several informants reported arriving at Sōjiji with excitement for their training, far more reported feelings of anxiety and nervousness for what was to come.

The First Days

An unsui needs to assimilate very quickly to his new life within the temple community, as the rhythm of daily life at Sōjiji cannot be interrupted in order to ease the new arrivals into their new routines. Because of this, each new unsui spends their first week at Sōjiji in the *Tanga-ryō*, or "Department for Spending the Night." It is here that the fresh and nervous unsui are given a crash course in temple policies, personal

comportment and the schedule that will become their daily routine over the next year of their lives.

The Tanga-ryō is a "temporary place" in several senses. Previously, being led to the Tanga-ryō was a continuation of the probationary tests of the *jōzan* ritual; for seven days, a new monk was made to sit in zazen from morning to evening, stopping only to eat (when meals were brought to him) or to sleep (when bedtime was announced). Today, however, the week spent in the Tanga-ryō is used as a period of orientation for the new monks: they participate in morning ceremonies, are led around to the various departments of the temple so that they can see firsthand what jobs will be expected of them, and most importantly, receive instruction on daily life at Sōjiji so that when they formally enter the community at the end of their probationary week, their transition will be as smooth as possible.

In another sense, the Tanga-ryō is temporary because it only "exists" during the limited time frame in which Sōjiji is expecting new arrivals. While every other temple department has a space dedicated to its purposes, the Tanga-ryō comes into being when newly arrived monks are taken to a multipurpose room on the first floor of the Denkōkan. The room has tall windows which, in addition to making the room bright, allow the new unsui to be observed from outside the room. In order to maximize wall space – zazen practice in the Sōtō tradition necessitates that a sitter face a wall or opaque surface – temporary wooden dividers with low shelves are set up, giving each new unsui a place to set down their traveling gear, take their meals and sit zazen. Paper sheets detailing Sōjiji's daily schedule and protocol are hung high on these walls to allow the unsui to

reference them. Once the last of the new arrivals has left the Tanga-ryō, the dividers are taken down, and the Tanga-ryō disappears until a new batch of unsui arrives.

New arrivals of former times were treated politely as guests; the unsui in the Tanga-ryō today have much in common with military recruits at boot camp. An unsui's time spent in the Tanga-ryō is essential for jumpstarting the transformation of the new arrivals into Sōtō Zen – and specifically Sōjiji-trained – monks. To survive at Sōjiji, an unsui must unlearn much of what they have learned growing up in modern Japan: they will have to relearn how to walk, how to stand, how to sit, how to eat, how to sleep, and how to speak. If they do not – or if they resist – the consequences can be severe.

The re-education of the unsui begins immediately upon stepping over the threshold of the Taihōkan and into Sōjiji's corridors. While taking instruction from their superiors, the unsui are made to stand at attention for long periods with their hands and arms raised in *gasshō,* a position of respect whereby the hands are held palms together with the point of the fingertips at the level of one's nose, and the arms held parallel to the floor. Holding *gasshō* for extended periods of time is not as easy as it looks; because of the precise way the arms and hands must be held, the shoulders and dorsal muscles in the upper back used to support the arms become fatigued and quickly begin to ache. The pain soon moves to the lower back, and very quickly the effort of trying to maintain the *gasshō* position becomes a daunting physical challenge in and of itself.

Adding to this is the requirement that the initiates must learn to sit for extended periods of time in *seiza*, a formal kneeling position in which the buttocks rest on the heels of the feet while the upper body is held upright, with the weight of the body resting on the shinbones and tops of the feet. This position quickly cuts off blood to the legs,

starting first with numbness in the feet, and creeping up towards the thighs. For the beginner, the "pins and needles" feeling begins in the feet in a matter of minutes, and if the position is maintained for longer, the legs go completely numb. This is the position that the unsui must sit in during formal occasions such as morning ceremonies, which can easily take upwards of forty-five minutes. While the pain in the legs can be mitigated somewhat by shifting one's body weight or moving to a cross-legged sitting position, these are not options allowed to the unsui.

When *gasshō* and *seiza* are combined – for example, when reading from a text while chanting – virtually every muscle group in the body is forced to work in ways that they are rarely made to do in everyday life outside of a temple. After as few as three days, the otherwise pliant tatami floor under one's legs begins to feel as hard as stone, and tension in the upper body muscles begin to resist all attempts to hold *gasshō* for any length of time.

Pushing the new arrival's body to its physical limits is in many ways precisely the point: *gasshō* and *seiza* are part of a kinesthetic vocabulary of discipline, and bodily resistance to the pain caused by holding these positions is equated with mental attachment to the comforts of one's former life. Yet, as one experienced informant told me, it is not enough to merely try to endure the pain; rather, the deeper lesson is the unsui must come to *accept* the pain and understand it as a necessary part of *shugyō*. It is only when this is understood that attachment to ideas of the body and self can be cast aside and the training can truly begin. In time, the body will become accustomed to the new things it is being forced to do, but for now, the unsui's "unenlightened" body must

quickly reach a point where it can do what is expected of it despite the pain the unsui is experiencing.

Equally important is that the new arrival demonstrates the willingness to unquestioningly obey the commands of his superiors – which, as new arrivals, is more or less everyone at Sōjiji.[7] For the most part, communication by a *shintō* to a superior is limited "yes!" (*hai!*), "no!" (*iie!*) and "thank you!" (*arigatō gozaimashita!*) responses, shouted at the top of one's lungs in the way of a military recruit. The unsui are also expected to not waste time when they are required to be somewhere: it is common to hear groups of barefoot unsui thundering down the wooden hallways at top speed on their way to their chores. Likewise, the unsui are required to stop what they are doing and stand to the side to salute a superior with a deep bow in *gasshō* should they pass by one another the temple corridors.

This first week is a physically and emotionally trying time for all the new unsui. Most have no experience with being spoken to with such severity, enduring such physical demands, or living under the strict gaze of superiors who are quick to punish any infractions of the rules. As the body begins to buckle under the mounting physical stressors, doubts begin to race through the unsui's mind. The thought of persevering

[7] Officially, "superiority" is calculated by simply comparing the length of time since a given monk formally entered the monastery. This means that an unsui who arrived even one day before another is technically the "superior" in the relationship.

In actual practice, however, I never witnessed or heard secondhand of a situation where one new arrival tried to pull rank on another based on relative time spent at the temple; for all intents and purposes, the new arrivals are better understood collectively as a "class of" a given year, similar to college alumni. Among themselves, they refer to others of their cohort as *dōangosha* (literally "those who participated in the same retreat (*ango*)"). This use of *dō* ("same") parallels that of *dōhai* ("social equal"; "peer") or *dōkyūsei* ("classmate") and indicates that all of the unsui who entered around a given time are considered to hold the same position in the hierarchy. They are *kōhai* ("subordinate") to previous "classes" of monks, and *senpai* ("superior") to the entrants of the following year and later.

through a year of such a lifestyle is so daunting that fleeing the temple becomes more and more tempting. Every couple of years a scared unsui actually takes flight.

On the seventh day after he stood in front of the gate of Sōjiji asking for admittance, an unsui leaves the Tanga-ryō. At this point, he is formally admitted into the community of monks in a secret ceremony in the Monk's Hall known as the *nyūdō shiki* ("Entering the Hall"). He will be assigned a single tatami mat in the hall over which his name will be hung: this is where he will sleep and sit zazen. At the head of his assigned mat he has two wooden drawers, one for his bedding, and another for his personal belongings.

By the first of April, all of the new unsui who will be entering Sōjiji have arrived. Those who arrived last have already left the Tanga-ryō, and have been integrated into the monastic community. Each of the seventy-five monks has been assigned a temple department that they will report to on a daily basis for their work detail.

On April 2nd, all of the new novices participate in an induction ceremony known as "Hanging the Staff" (*menkata shiki*). This ceremony marks the official beginning of the summer retreat period, and the assembled monks are now said to be "inside the rules" (*seichū*). For the next one hundred days, all of the newly-arrived unsui will be prohibited from leaving the temple grounds, receiving phone calls or letters from home, or reading a newspaper.

Following the ceremony, a commemorative photo will be taken for the occasion, featuring the abbot flanked by the senior teachers, and the older priests assigned to supervise the new monks. This cohort of unsui will be known for posterity as the "new arrivals of the Heisei 19 [2007] summer retreat." More importantly, from this point

forward, the unsui will refer to themselves collectively as *wareware shugyōsō* – "we training-priests."

The "Heart of *Shugyō*"

From the exterior, there is little to distinguish the Monk's Hall from the other buildings in the temple precincts. The stairs that lead to the main doors – which may be opened slightly to allow air circulation when the weather is particularly nice or hot – are blocked by the same wooden barricade and "no entry" sign that are found near many other temple structures. In fact, two nearby service roads provide enough foot and motor traffic to make this one of the least quiet places in the temple complex, especially when a newspaper delivery motorcycle goes by. The only visible indication that this is the sanctuary of the monks-in-training is a weathered sign hanging above the hall, written in stylized calligraphy, which indicates that this is the "Place Where Buddhas Are Chosen" (*senbutsujō*).

Of all the buildings that comprise a traditional seven-building monastery, only the Monk's Hall (*sōdō*) can really be called the monk's own. An unsui will spend approximately a third of his life at Sōjiji in this hall alone, with that time mostly spent sleeping or sitting zazen. Formerly, meals were also taken in the Monk's Hall, but on most days of the year the hall is no longer used for this purpose. The monks now gather to take their meals in the communal dining hall above the main reception. For the most part, the monks' eating lacquered bowls remain stowed in little cubbies in the Sōdō.

On all but a few rare occasions, the laity is forbidden from entering the hall. Even in those situations where members of the laity are allowed to enter, they are restricted to the outer hall (*gaitan*), which is little more than a wide perimeter encircling the protective sanctuary of the inner hall (*naitan*). The heavy sliding doors to the hall are nearly always closed; all that most visitors to Sōjiji will ever see of the interior of the Monk's Hall are three staged photographs of daily life in the hall that have been posted above the closed entryway.

Over the course of my research, I was allowed to enter the outer hall a handful of times with a small number of other practioners during the intensive periods of zazen known as *sesshin* (discussed in Chapter 4). On two occasions, however, I was secreted into the inner hall by my monastic informants for a quick peek for "research purposes". I could write down what I saw, but I was expressly forbidden from taking pictures.[8]

The squat sliding doors that connect the Monk's Hall with the main corridor of the temple do not convey the immensity of the hall beyond it. Stepping over the threshold into the Sōdō, one is struck by the cavernous size of the space, despite only the outer hall being immediately visible. The ceiling of the hall is easily forty feet high, punctuated by wooden buttresses and the occasional hanging light fixture. The walls constructed of cypress wood have, like the temple corridors, darkened with age. They stand in stark contrast to the paper-covered sliding panels that begin just above eye level, and the white concrete walls that stand above them. The hard, cold concrete floor has been shined to a

[8] I know of only several extant photographs which show the actual inside of the Monk's Hall. Most photographs of monastic practice at Sōjiji – for example, in magazine articles or the cover of the recent volume *Zen Ritual* (2008) – feature the unsui sitting in the outer hall, or in the Public Hall (*Shuryō*), which superficially resembles the Monk's Hall. Even sectarian publications do not violate this rule.

high gloss by repeated daily washing. The outer hall is comfortably drafty in the summer, but is frigid in winter.

The outer hall is little more than the space between the exterior walls of the building itself and the walls which enclose the inner hall. The eastern portion of the hall is the widest, with two tatami platforms with room for ten seats, split by the entryway to the inner hall placed in the center of the wall. In this entryway, an opaque rattan curtain is rolled down from the ceiling to the floor most days of the year, limiting curious eyes (such as those who may have snuck into the Sōdō) from seeing into the inner hall. A two-sided metal sign hangs from the center of the entryway at eye-level: on one side is written "*zazen*" for the days in which the unsui wake at the usual time to sit the morning session of zazen. On the other is written "*muzen*" ("no zazen"), for those rest days in which the unsui are given an extra half-hour to sleep in. Over the door hangs another name for the Sōdō, "Cloud Hall" (*undō*).

The inner hall itself is a simple wooden construction. Seventy-four tatami mats encircle the perimeter of the hall; at the head of each are the drawers the monks use to place their bedding and their personal belongings. Two islands of ten tatami mats – five on each side, separated by shelving in the middle – flank the devotional image in the center, essentially bifurcating the room along the horizontal axis. On each tatami mat sits a single black *zafu* with a vertical white name tag upon which the name of the owner is written. These are the cushions that the unsui carried with them to Sōjiji, one for each monk in residence.

On an elaborately decorated platform in the very center of the hall sits a finely-detailed image of the Bodhisattva Monju, embodiment of wisdom and protector of the

Buddhist clergy. Monju is pictured as the idealized monk: seated in perpetual zazen, he is eternally vigilant and maintains perfect form, never faltering in his practice. Monju's eyes, half-opened in meditation, gaze at the floor of the entryway into the hall. A small altar with flowers, candles, and an incense burner sit on the dais front of the image. On a lower table in front of this lies the flat-ended stick used to mete out discipline in the hall. A raised bowing platform sits on the floor immediately in front of this image.

All together, Sōjiji's Sōdō has room for eighty-six unsui in the inner hall and room for twenty additional seats in the outer hall. If one adds the raised chairs reserved for the abbot and the principal instructor known as the *godō* (lit. "rear of the hall"), the total number of seats in the hall becomes 108, a "complete" number in Buddhist cosmology.

An unsui's assigned place within the Sōdō corresponds with their position in the relative hierarchy of the community of monks. In principle, the latest arrival to Sōjiji is assigned the seat on the western side of the hall, immediately to the left of the main entryway. The next most recent arrival is given the seat to his left, and so forth. As one moves clockwise around the hall, the stature of the monk (as determined by tenure in the temple) can be seen to increase. The tatami mat immediately to the right of the main entryway is reserved for the *shuso*, a monk elected to be the representative of the corps of unsui. To his left is the raised cushioned chair where the abbot sits on the occasions where he joins the assembly for zazen. A complete circle of hierarchy which links the highest ranking monk with the lowest meets at precisely the point where Monju eternally gazes. It is possible to draw a parallel between the construction of the Monk's Hall and

the visual symbolism of the *kechimyaku* certificate a monk receives during his tonsure: ultimately, the lowest student is the teacher of the highest master.

The inner hall of the Sōdō is called the "heart of *shugyō*" (*shugyō no chūshin*) not only for its central place in the monk's lives, but for the fact that there are more prohibitions and rules governing behavior associated with it than with any other hall in the temple complex, save for the toilet and bath. In the inner hall, monastic discipline is expected to be the most strict and severe. While in the hall, the assembled monks are enjoined to follow the impossible example of perfect self-discipline set by the image of Monju in the center of the hall: unfaltering in their practice of proper protocol and regulation, unwavering in their devotion to *shugyō* as a means of transforming themselves, and unmoving in the face of exhaustion or the passions of the world. When a monk cannot be these things, the hall monitors are there to whip a monk back to diligent observance of his *shugyō*, an act of violent compassion.

By design, the Monk's Hall is a perfectly disciplined – and perfectly disciplining – space. Physically present on their on their assigned tatami mats, each unsui in the hall is placed within a visible "network of relations" that renders hierarchy and rank immediately knowable and incontrovertible (Foucault 1977: 146). While the close proximity of the monks' living space may resemble a military barracks more than the discrete cells of a Catholic monastery, space in the Monk's Hall is partitioned in such a way that the individual becomes the subject of constant and unrelenting disciplinary forces.

An unsui's space (and by extension, his place in the community) is assigned to him by virtue of the order in which he arrived at the temple, relative to other monks. An

unsui entering the Monk's Hall for the first time finds his place by locating his name tag, posted high off the floor in advance of his arrival. This name tag – white characters written on a thin black lacquered board – lists the unsui's prefecture of origin, followed by his family name and his Dharma name.

In the context of a temple the size of Sōjii, this single tatami mat is virtually microscopic. A tatami mat (*jō*), a unit of measurement standardized by regional custom, is roughly the dimensions of a human body, approximately .8 meters (2.6 ft) in width and 1.82 meters (6 ft) in length. This makes the unsui's "personal space" in the temple little more than 1.5 square meters (15 square feet). Each tatami mat touches the mat next to it with only a hairbreadth of space between them. It is expressly forbidden for an unsui to "spill over" into adjoining spaces.

Even when an unsui is not physically present in the hall, his name tag and *zafu* cushion (also inscribed with his name, and always positioned such that his name is visible) remain behind as material stand-ins for the monk within the network of relations encoded in the layout of the hall. Such precise "placing" within the space of the hall allows for the monk – in every other way superficially identical to those around him – to be individuated and monitored. Monks whose behavior causes them to stand out from the assembly can be immediately identified and corrective forces applied. On the occasions when an unsui flees the temple, his absence is immediately revealed to those sitting near him, and to those who are observing him

In this regard, the inner hall of the Sōdō is a perfect panopticon, a disciplinary apparatus in which coercive power is internalized in those who are to be made into obedient subjects of the disciplinary gaze. On the one hand, the image of the bodhisattva

Monju, visible to all in the center of the hall is a gentle reminder of the potential in all of the training monks to achieve enlightenment (*satori*), taught in the Sōtō sect as a continuous state of perfect discipline that carries over into every aspect of their lives. On the other hand, Monju is an ever-present taskmaster whose central position in the hall grants him a vantage point from which to monitor all of the monks. His impossible expectations of obedience and discipline are enforced by the hall monitors who patrol the Sōdō like guards with drawn swords.

While sitting zazen, and even while they sleep, the monks are perpetually aware of the disciplining forces being applied to them from every direction.

Embodied Lineage

Every morning at precisely four (four-thirty in the winter), two unsui begin a running course through the long wooden corridors of Sōjiji, each brandishing a large handbell that they swing the entire way. These unsui are charged with the very important task of waking the temple to start the day; this is known as *shinrei*, a word which refers to both the act of waking and the bell that is used for the task. The ring of the bell and the heavy footstep of the sprinting unsui pierce the darkness of the temple night like a passing train, starting quiet in the distance, rising to a near earsplitting volume as the unsui passes by, and then quickly fading away as he moves on to the next building. Dawn is still hours away, but morning has come to Sōjiji.

In the Sōdō, *shinrei* is like the playing of Reveille in a military barracks: the monks, many still groggy from a late night spent completing their responsibilities in one

of the temple's many departments, quickly rise to put their bedding away, rushing en masse to the bathroom to relieve themselves, to wash their face and heads and to brush their teeth. It is vital that they move quickly, as they have only ten minutes before the bell is rung to mark the start of morning zazen, the official start of the temple day.

The single tatami mat that the unsui have only moments before used for sleeping is the same space upon which they will sit for zazen: rows of bedding have been replaced by rows of black *zafu* cushions. The unsui return to their tatami mats, raise their hands in gasshō and bow once towards the wall, turn clockwise and bow again to the center of the room in a show of respect for those who will be sitting next to them, and for those who will be sitting across from them. Taking care to avoid touching the wooden board at the front of the platform with either their buttocks or their feet, the unsui use their arms to push themselves onto their cushions and pull their feet up into a crossed-legged position, carefully arranging their slippers on the lip of the floor beneath the platform.

In most Sōtō training temples, the unsui would then immediately turn both their cushions and their bodies to face the wall. At Sōjiji, things are different: every morning, the hall monitor (*jikidō*) makes a brisk review of the assembled unsui, to see if any of their faces show traces of spiritual awakening and to verify that none of the young monks have fled during the night. He carries a thick wooden stick horizontally in his hands almost as a presentation, and visible to all he passes. The unsui, in turn, salute the monitor by raising their hands in gasshō as he passes by. When he has completed his rounds of the hall, the metal gong is struck three times; on the third strike, the lights are dimmed, and the assembly of monks turn to face the wall for morning zazen.

The concentration required to sit zazen is difficult to maintain no matter what time of the day it is attempted, but the combination of the silence of the hall, the dimmed lighting, and the very fact of having been asleep only minutes before all work against the sitting unsui. At this hour, in these conditions, it is easy to surrender to the siren call of sleep. It begins with the rationalization of "just closing my eyes for a bit" and before long, the poor unsui is nodding off, his head falling forward towards the wall.

Sometimes the unsui can catch himself in this process, restore his posture and reestablish his concentration with a few deep breaths. More often, however, the hall monitor – who has been slowly and silently patrolling the hall behind the unsui's backs with his stick raised vertically front of him – will catch the sleeping unsui first. The monitor will stop behind the sleeping monk, and present the stick (known as a *kyōsaku*) to the unsui's back. The monitor then firmly taps the unsui on the right shoulder with the stick to announce his presence. At this point, the unsui, suddenly shocked back into wakefulness, realizes he has been caught. He raises his hands in gasshō, bends forward in his seat, and leans his head to the left to expose his right shoulder to receive a blow from the *kyōsaku*.

The stick whistles through the air as the monitor swings it firmly against the unsui's exposed shoulder, the sharp crack of wood connecting with flesh suddenly breaking the silence of the hall. The unsui and hall monitor then place their hands together in gasshō and bow. The unsui resumes his zazen, and the hall monitor continues his round of the hall.

The characters comprising the word *kyōsaku* can be translated literally as "warning whip". For the unsui thus struck, the blow indeed serves as a punishment which

may be light or severe, depending on the monitor who delivers the blow. (On at least two occasions, I personally received a blow from a monitor that had me seeing stars at the moment of impact, and which left a visible bruise on my shoulder that lasted for about a week.) The strike of the *kyōsaku* is also as a well-placed jolt to a sleepy unsui's system intended to wake him up by unlocking the energy and tension that gathers in the shoulders, long recognized in Chinese medicine as a key pressure point of the body. The sound of the *kyōsaku* also serves as a warning to the monks sitting nearby: one punishment has already been meted, and another might follow should your practice become careless or lazy.

Nor should the *kyōsaku* be seen as a purely punative instrument. A restless or sleepy unsui can request a blow from the hall monitor at any time by raising his hands in gasshō as a signal to the monitor as he passes by. Such self-disciplining is encouraged by the unsui's superiors as an essential part of responsible and diligent practice.

For twenty minutes, the unsui sit facing the wall. The silence of the hall is punctuated only by periodic coughing and the crack of the *kyōsaku* as it connects with the back of another drowsy unsui.

At the end of the sitting period, the voice of the cantor breaks the stillness: "Let us receive our *kesa*" (*kesa o itadakimasu*).[9] Still facing the wall, the unsui place their folded *kesa* on the top of their heads.

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[9] I have always found it interesting that the Japanese *kesa* 袈裟 (a transliteration of the Sanskrit *kasaya*) is homophonic with the word *kesa* 今朝, or "this morning". Without any additional information *kesa o itadakimasu* could also be understood as "we receive this morning." This possible double entendre is supported by the fact that the *kesa* (as Dharma robe) is only "received" in such a manner during the morning hours. My informants, however, tell me that this is merely a linguistic coincidence.

With their hands in gasshō they chant:

Daisai gedatsu puku	How great, the robe of liberation,
Musō fukden e	a formless field of merit
Hibu nyorai kyō	Wrapping ourselves in Buddha's teaching,
Kōdo shoshujō	we free all living beings.[10]

After reciting this chant three times, the monks then unfold and don the *kesa*.

Of all the material trappings of Buddhism, the toga-like *kesa* (commonly translated as "Dharma robe") is perhaps the most universal, worn by monastics in Buddhist countries throughout Asia. The *kesa* has its origins in ancient Indian ascetic practices, where it was often the only body covering that a world renouncing mendicant would allow themselves. The Buddhist *kesa* was originally a patchwork sewn from unclean and discarded cloth such as soiled rags and pieces funeral shrouds. In the Indian context, this choice of materials communicated to observers that the mendicant had abandoned material attachments and renounced the dualities of purity and defilement and of modesty and impropriety that characterized daily social life.

As Buddhism traveled across Asia, monastic clothing was adapted to suit the climate and culture, but the monastic *kesa* has remained a constant. The modern Sōtō Zen *kesa* maintains the patchwork pattern of the Indian *kasaya*, but it is now sewn from swatches of clean cotton, silk or even artificial fabrics. A black *kesa* is given to the monk by the tonsuring priest during the *shukke tokudo* ceremony. When the novice becomes a fully-ordained Sōtō Zen priest, the color of the *kesa* will change from black to an earthen tone to mark the change in clerical status.

While the *kesa* is nearly universally accepted as the mark of a Buddhist monastic, the *kesa* has further significance in the Zen context. According to Zen historiography, the

[10] Sōtō-shū Nikka Kyō Daizen, 157; Sōtō School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practice, 72

Buddha, sensing that his departure from the world was imminent, assembled his followers to choose a successor. When his disciples had assembled, the Buddha held aloft a flower. This sign confused all but one of his disciples, who smiled at the sight of the flower. As the story goes, the Buddha chose this monk – Mahakashō – to be his successor, and the Buddha bestowed his *kesa* upon him to symbolize the transfer of authority.

During the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in China, Buddhist monastics of the emerging Ch'an school used this story to advocate the legitimacy of Ch'an over competing sects as the vehicle of the "true Dharma" taught by the historical Buddha. The *kesa*, not surprisingly, became a key symbol of this claim to legitimacy: citing this story, the Ch'an patriarchs claimed to have in their possession the original *kesa* worn by the Buddha. This *kesa* supposedly survived time and the elements by being passed by hand from a master to a student. Naturally, competing lineages within the Ch'an school were ingenious in producing stories of how they had come to possess the "true" Dharma robe of the Buddha. Reports of theft, murder, clandestine transmission ceremonies, and even magical acquisition of the true *kesa* fill the Ch'an literature of the time. Keizan's *Denkōroku* is characteristic of this genre, with the transmission of the *kesa* featuring prominently in his reckoning of the Sōtō Zen lineage.

The daily practice of receiving the *kesa* in Sōtō Zen temples has its origins in an episode appearing in both the Kesa Kudoku ("Merit of the Kesa") and Den'e ("Transmission of the Robe") chapters of Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*. While traveling through China as a young man, Dōgen describes visiting a temple where the Chinese monk sitting next to him quietly performed this small ceremony. He writes: "At that time, there arose in me a feeling I had never before experienced.... Seeing it done now, before my very

eyes, I was overjoyed." Dōgen vowed to transmit this practice to Japan, where he says it was previously unknown (Nishijima and Cross 1994: 121; 138).

For the monk to "receive" the *kesa* on a daily basis is therefore an act with multiple levels of symbolic significance. On one level, placing the *kesa* on the head recalls the hair that was shaven to separate the monk from the laity. As the monk is made to recall his responsibility of performing his *shugyō* for the salvation of all sentient beings, the act of removing the *kesa* from the head and wrapping it around his body is a daily reenactment of their tonsure, and a renewal of their personal monastic obligations.

On a deeper level, the community of monks is made to personally reenact the foundational myths of the Zen (and particularly Sōtō Zen) sectarian genealogy. Like Makakashō, the first patriarch, the unsui receive the *kesa* to signify their legitimacy as successors to the Buddha's true Dharma. Like Anan, the second patriarch, the *kesa* has come to rest on their heads to signify the moment of awakening and receipt of the teachings. Like Eka, the first recipient of the teachings supposedly transmitted from India to China by Bodhidharma, they are enjoined to "pass on the *kesa* by which the authenticity of our line is established" (Nearman 2001: 155). In this way, the unsui are remade daily as inheritors of the unique Sōtō Zen tradition.

These themes are reinforced immediately following the receipt of the *kesa* through the performance of the Dentō Fūgin, a recitation of three foundational texts whose reading serve as a powerful daily reinforcement of Sōtō sectarian identity. The first text, the *Sandōkai* is attributed to Sekitō Kisen (700-790); the second, the *Hōkyō Zanmai* is attributed to Tōzan Ryōkai (807-869), the first to claim that his teachings were of a distinct Sōtō Zen (Ch. *Caodong*) school. The third text, the *Gōjūshichi Butsu* (The

"Fifty-seven Buddhas") is a recitation of the names of each of the ancestors in the lineage of Sōjiji's founder, Keizan Jōkin. Beginning with six "historical" Buddhas, the lineage traces the unilineal master-student descent from Shakyamuni Buddha through the Twenty-Eight Indian Patriarchs, from Bodhidharma through the twenty-one Chinese Patriarchs, and finally with Dōgen and the Japanese Sōtō patriarchs that succeed him. The recitation of linage in the Dentō Fūgin ends with the master of the founder of a temple: in Sōjiji's case, the chanting ends with Tetsu Gikai, the third Japanese Sōtō patriarch and Keizan's master.

A single strike of the gong signals the end of both zazen and the Dentō Fūgin. With this complete, the monks rise from their positions on the tatami platform and process out of the Sōdō in double file, towards the Daisodō for the morning service.

The Food Makes the Monk

By the time the morning service has ended, an unsui has been awake for nearly two hours, and it has been twelve hours since his last meal. He is famished: the concentration needed for zazen and almost an hour and a half of nearly continuous chanting demand a surprising amount of energy from the body. The monks in the kitchen know this, and have been following the progress of the morning services on a closed circuit video feed from the Dharma Hall on a television mounted on the wall. It is their responsibility to have the morning meal ready to be served to one hundred and fifty hungry monks in the communal dining hall within minutes of the end of morning services.

The unsui return briefly to the Monk's Hall to exchange their *kesa* for their *rakusu*, a bib-like, patchwork cloth worn around the neck. While it carries the same religious significance as the *kesa* (and its patchwork style is clearly designed as a reference to the traditional Indian garment), the *rakusu* is an invention of Japanese Buddhism which allows the monk to go about his everyday activities and duties without his movement being impeded by his floor-length *kesa*, which is neither practical nor utilitarian.

The unsui then walk briskly from the Sōdō, through the long main corridor to the temple reception, above which sits the dining hall. Before the monks step onto the steep staircase that links the dining hall with the reception, they carefully line their slippers against the wall. They then file into the dining hall, which is little more than a wide room with low, long tables with thin cushions for sitting.

The monks line up to receive their food from the kitchen monks who, once meals have been prepared, are reassigned as servers. The servers are positioned in the center of the room guarding vats of rice gruel to be ladled out to each unsui in line. The unsui, in turn, indicates to the server with a hand motion when they have received enough. As far as I could tell, seating in the dining hall is by choice: like a cafeteria, groups of friends could sit together, making the atmosphere in the room more relaxed than the rigid hierarchical organization of the Monk's Hall.

After all the monks are seated, the assembly recites a mealtime liturgy during which they express their gratitude for the food they are about to eat.

Central to this is the *Gokan no Ge* ("The Verse of Five Contemplations"):

> First, we reflect on the effort that has brought us this food, and consider how it comes to us
> Second, we reflect on our virtue and practice, and whether we are worthy of this offering
> Third, we regard greed as the obstacle to freedom of mind
> Fourth, we regard this meal as medicine to sustain our life
> Fifth, for the sake of enlightenment we now receive this food.[11]

The monks then rededicate the merit generated through this recitation to the benefit of the lay donors whose donation of food (or the money used to purchase the food) made the meal possible. These donors' names are read by the cantor during the recitation, but are also written on long strips of paper suspended from a wooden rack visible to all in the hall. While reminding the monks of the necessity of gratitude for the charity of the laity, the chanting is also a test of patience for the starving unsui. As soon as the chant ends, the unsui bow to their bowls in *gasshō,* and immediately begin eating their food.

Breakfast in a Zen temple is quite spartan: the unsui are served a simple gruel (known as *kayu*) made from white rice and water, often accompanied by a mixture of powdered seasonings and herbs that give the otherwise bland gruel a measure of flavor. To the gruel is added a side dish of pickled vegetables that serve as both a palette cleanser and a means of mopping up the gelatinous residue left in the eating bowl by the *kayu.* Towards the end of the meal, any remaining residue is cleaned from the bowl by the addition of hot water poured from brass kettles. The unsui are free to drink this water, or they can dispose of it into wooden buckets that are brought by around for this purpose.

Time in the day, even this early in the morning, is precious, and the unsui are not allotted much time to eat before the hot water is passed around to signal the end of the meal. While food is understood as a basic necessity of life, it is treated as a medicine – a

[11] Sōtō School Scriptures for Daily Services and Practices, 76

means of alleviating the pain of hunger – rather than a luxury to be enjoyed. In this regard, very little time is allowed for casual eating or for savoring the meal. An unsui must learn to eat fast enough to have finished every grain of rice he has been given by end of the eating period, but he must also learn to maintain proper eating etiquette and not slurp down his food.

In principle, the unsui are permitted to eat their fill, either by signaling to the server to fill their bowls with more than a ladleful or by returning to the servers for seconds. In practice, however, I seldom saw an unsui take more than a ladleful, and I almost never saw them request seconds. It was difficult for me to determine exactly why this was: Had the monks internalized repeated instruction from their superiors that a monk should exercise restraint and moderation? Perhaps it stemmed from a desire not to stand out from the rest of the group by asking for more than others took or were given? Maybe it was a result of a "monkish machismo" from which the unsui competed with one another to show off how austere or how diligent they were in their performance of *shugyō*? Was their hunger actually sated by the portions given to them?

It is likely that the monks' mealtime restraint may be a combination of all these factors. One anecdote that may shed light on this took place during a zazen retreat where I witnessed an example of the fun the servers might have at the expense of a hapless monk who had the misfortune to ask for more. The initial "infraction" might have been an accident: the monk most likely forgot to give the upwards hand motion that signals "enough", leading the server to give him more than he wanted or could finish. The joking started with the next meal, when the servers began filling his bowl to the brim with rice, even after he frantically signaled for them to stop. The following day, they filled his bowl

beyond its limits, this time heaping four or five portions into the bowl, which the monk diligently ate. When the servers repeated the trick again with the next meal, the poor monk had come prepared, bringing with him a piece of plastic wrap to save the rice for later. The joke ended on the last day of the retreat when the servers brought the unsui afternoon tea in a finely-crafted porcelain teacup on a small red lacquered pedestal – a piece normally reserved for honored guests and high-ranking monks. The servers began calling him *rōshi* (a term of respect reserved for higher-ranking clergy), and responded to his embarrassment with over-the-top displays of bowing and deferential language. When the meal was over, the smiling servers crowded around the defeated unsui while a temple photographer took a picture.

While this joke was a harmless (and from the vantage point of an observer, hilarious) lesson in the effectiveness of communal discipline, the message sent to the unsui by his peers was clear: training monks don't take seconds.

The new arrivals I spoke with were unanimous in telling me that the dietary restrictions of *shugyō* were the most difficult adjustment that they had to make in coming to Sōjiji. Between the primarily vegetarian diet and the pressure to restrict one's portion size, an unsui will consume only about one thousand calories per day. For a twenty-two year old healthy male, this diet is emaciating. By their own estimate, a new arrival will lose between five and twenty kilograms (12 to 44 lbs) within the first ninety days of their *shugyō*, with the average weight loss being around nine kilograms (20 lb).

The traditional diet of an unsui is not only insufficient for basic dietary needs, but it is also demonstrably unhealthy. The traditional menu at a Zen temple was dictated by which foods could be preserved in large quantities for long periods of time. Milled white

rice has long been the foundation for temple meals owing to its long storage life and ability to make the eater feel full. Yet, in preserving the rice, there is a trade-off: virtually all naturally occurring nutrients, most notably thiamin (vitamin B1), is removed from the final product during the husking process. The pickled vegetables and soups that accompany rice-based meals are similarly empty, delivering high amounts of sodium for very little return in essential nutrients.

As little as a generation ago, unsui were regularly afflicted with debilitating illnesses caused by the vitamin, calcium and protein deficiencies in the monastic diet. The most dreaded of these diseases was *beriberi*, a disease of the nervous system caused by thiamin deficiency which begins with painful swelling in the extremities, and if left untreated, nerve damage, paralysis and eventual death. One monk who trained at Sōjiji in the 1980s told me that, "in my time, everyone got *beriberi* during their training. Oh, it was painful! Of course we were afraid of getting it, but it was something that you waited for, because it was inevitable. When you got sick, you went to the hospital and they gave you medicine. When you got better, you went back to Sōjiji and continued your *shugyō*."

Since the 1950s, subtle changes to the monastic diet at Sōjiji have been implemented by abbots who sought ways of maintaining the health of the temple community, while preserving the dietary and religious traditions of Sōtō Zen training temples. The earliest change was to allow the unsui to eat a raw egg over a bowl of rice in the morning to add fat and protein into their diet. Though the eggs were provided by the temple kitchen, they were optional for the monk. At the time, this was a controversial decision, and compromise was needed: before they eat the egg, any monk must temporarily "defrock" himself by removing his *rakusu* or *kesa* and hanging it on a peg.

By so doing, the monk is not held culpable for any violation of the monastic precept against the taking of life. Later innovations, like drinking a pint of milk once a week on Sunday or taking daily multivitamins, did not include such compromise measures. In the years since these small changes were adopted, the debilitating diseases caused by deficiencies in the monastic diet have fallen off dramatically.

Even still, the low-calorie diet and the strict work regimen enact a profound change on the unsui from the moment he steps into the temple: by the end of his first hundred days, an unsui will no longer have the plump softness of a youth spent in a comfortable, mostly sedentary lifestyle. His face will be drawn and angular. He will have lost most of his body fat, leaving only wiry, lean muscle behind. Sitting for extended periods in *seiza* will actually become easier for him, as there is less weight for his folded legs to support. His very body will have become a living testament to the austerities that he has endured.

Twenty-Four Hours-a-Day *Shugyō*

It is just after 2 pm on the fourth day of the June zazen retreat known as the *Denkō-e Sesshin*. For over three days, myself and a group of lay participants have joined the monastic community in the Sōdō for repeated back-to-back sessions of zazen, punctuated by breaks for meals, lectures, and the occasional hour of downtime. The days start earlier during the *sesshin* – wakeup is at 3am – and that time is spent fitting in more sessions of zazen to an otherwise completely full day.

I hurt. My shoulders and lower back are sore from hours of sitting in zazen. The joints in my knees are slowly becoming inflamed from sitting cross-legged in the full-lotus position for the first time after being encouraged to do so by a long-time practitioner who is apparently more flexible than I am.

On the heels of the rainy season, June in Yokohama is hot and humid. The polyester fabric of the clothes we have been lent by the temple does not breathe, and even in the coolness of the Sōdō's outer hall, I am sweating profusely. Overall, I am very uncomfortable.

Through it all, I am struggling to keep my focus through a mental haze caused by lack of sleep and the effort required to make observations and take fieldnotes. Even producing simple conversation has become difficult for me. The hour-long sermon we have just sat through – spent reading and listening to the master's monologue on an esoteric text written in classical Japanese – has not helped the situation any. As we make our way back to the Monk's Hall for another three-hour session of zazen, I am hoping that the exhaustion written on my face will serve not only as an indicator of the sacrifices I am making for my research, but also as a deterrent to conversation.

I am shocked out of my thoughts by a tap on my shoulder. I turn to see Wakamatsu and a group of several other unsui standing behind me.

"*Oi*, Joshua! How is everything?" Wakamatsu asks, raising his hand in greeting. By this point, our friendship had moved past formalities like *gasshō*.

"I'm exhausted," I sigh, looking down. The cluster of unsui that Wakamatsu was walking with shuffle past us on their way to the Monk's Hall, leaving us to walk together at my slower pace.

I open my mouth to say something conversational, but what comes out is neither Japanese nor English, but rather a failed sentence lost in a jumble of words. I slap my cheek to wake myself up. Trying to recover my dignity, I tell him that I am so sleep-deprived, I can't even think anymore.

"Sleep deprived?!" Wakamatsu laughs in friendly mockery. He turns and grabs the arm of a passing unsui. "Check it out – Joshua says that he's not getting enough sleep!" They both chuckle as the unsui continues past us. Wakamatsu turns back to me and smiles. "I've been sleep deprived since the moment I got here," he explains. "We all have. It's part of *shūgyō*, you know? You get used to it."

"How long did it take you to get used to it?" I ask. "I don't think I can take much more of this."

"Well, *I'm* not used to it," he says. "They told us it takes about ninety days. After that, you just don't feel it anymore."

I did the math. At that point, the majority of the new arrivals had been at Sōjiji for just over two months, give or take several weeks. Some of the earlier arrivals would have only recently hit the ninety-day mark, but the rest had not quite reached the point where their bodies had adjusted to the demands of their intense schedule. I quickly realized that my struggle to cope with four days of little sleep had no chance of winning me any sympathy from this crowd.

The day at Sōjiji officially begins at four in the morning and officially ends at nine in the evening. For most of the unsui, however, fitting in all of their responsibilities into these seventeen hours is a very elusive goal. For the monks who have been assigned to the responsibilities of waking up the temple, preparing the Dharma Hall for the

morning ceremonies or working in the kitchen, the day starts at 2:30 am, a full two hours earlier than the rest of the temple. For those who work in the administrative and accounting departments, or who have responsibilities preparing items such as the handwritten tablets used in memorial ceremonies, the day commonly ends well after midnight. On average, an unsui at Sōjiji is operating on fewer than four hours of sleep a night for nearly their entire time at the temple. While I – as a layperson, as a researcher, and as a non-Japanese – was quickly forgiven for any *faux pas* or breach of conduct committed while stumbling around in a haze of exhaustion, the unsui are not afforded this luxury.

Over half of the incoming unsui are assigned first to the *Kandoku-ryō*, or "Department of Silent Reading". In previous generations, the monks in this department would spend the majority of their day in the large study hall situated across from the Monk's Hall, memorizing the daily liturgy and studying Buddhist scriptures. Twice daily, after breakfast and after lunch, the unsui would gather to listen to a sermon. In addition to this, the unsui of the Kandoku-ryō were obliged to take part in the midday and evening services in the Daisodō. This full-time study was intended to quickly bring the unsui up to speed with the basic required chants necessary for daily life in a Zen temple, as well as provide a seminary education to transform the young unsui into future clergymen.

Today, the unsui have regularly scheduled classes and lectures in the afternoons and evenings; correspondingly, time that an unsui might spend in independent study has largely been done away with. So too has the midday service. The study hall is now reserved for lay visitors to sit zazen. The time that was formerly scheduled for study and sermons is now occupied by work detail (*samu*).

Sōjiji is an impressively large temple, and the manpower required to keep it clean it is equally impressive. Twice every day, the unsui of the Kandoku-ryō are expected to clean every wooden surface in the temple following a circuit that begins at the doors of the abbot's residence and which makes a nearly complete clockwise circle through the temple corridors. When corrected for linear distance, the entire cleaning circuit is more than eight-tenths of a kilometer long and more than four meters (twelve feet) wide in most places.

Cleaning more than 3,600 square meters of wooden flooring twice a day is a chore in its own right, but the unsui are armed for the task only with buckets of water and rags. Further, the unsui are made to sprint this entire circuit arched over, barefoot, and with their hands sliding on damp rags while their legs propel them forward. This cleaning technique is often used in the martial arts in order to discipline the student to respect their practice space while simultaneously building leg and back muscles. Yet, unlike most martial arts halls – or most Japanese temples, for that matter – the sheer size of Sōjiji transforms this traditional training technique into a punishing trial of endurance.

Before they begin, the unsui change out of their monastic robes and into a loose-fitting black pan known as a *samue* ("work clothes"). They wrap a white towel around their heads to prevent sweat – and there will be sweat! – from falling on the floor while they clean.

The unsui start their on-their-hands sprint through the temple, with each monk covering as much surface area as they can before their wet rags dry up and lose their ability to slide. The unsui make it look easy, but it is a grueling workout that works every muscle group, especially the muscles of the legs and the back.

On several occasions, I volunteered to help out with the cleaning. I was in good shape, and I thought I could keep up with the unsui. My failure to be able to do for even a fraction of their workout was catastrophically comical: either I couldn't push the rag (it was too dry) or I slipped face first onto the wooden flooring (it was too wet). On the rare occasions where I got it just right, I could only push the rag for about thirty feet before I was breathing heavily and my legs and arms wanted to give out.

This entire circuit is repeated by the unsui twice a day, regardless of summer heat or winter chill. The twice-daily washings have prematurely darkened the once-light Japanese cypress lumber from which the temple floors are constructed, making the temple look centuries older than it really is.

Walking through the temple with an older priest one afternoon, we pass a group of cleaning unsui, who jump up from their washing to salute us as we go by. We make our way to the Daisodō, where four unsui are using wicker brooms to systematically sweep the entirety of the hall -- mat by mat, row by row, one thousand mats in all. As the priest and I stand at the front of the hall, I ask him why the unsui are made to clean the temple as often as they do. Wouldn't once a day be enough?

"The goal of *samu* is not to make things clean," he replies, not taking his eyes off of the monks making their slow progress through the hall. "The goal of *samu* is *samu* itself. If we wanted them only to clean, we would give them a vacuum cleaner or a mop, and they could make the floors sparkle. But 'cleanliness' and 'dirtiness' are in your mind. You make something clean and just like that [he snaps his fingers], it's dirty again.

"In a Zen temple, *samu* and *zazen* are the same. During *zazen*, we are 'just sitting' (*tada suwaru*). *Zazen* has no goal. We try to keep our minds from wandering off from where we are, and focus on 'now and here'.

"With *samu*, it is 'just cleaning' (*tada sōji suru*). There is no use trying to make things clean. With every step you need to think, 'I'm sweeping, I'm sweeping'.

"People think enlightenment (*satori*) is a moment when you say, 'I get it!' It's different then that. There's a saying: '*issun suwaru, issun hotoke*' – 'sit for a moment, buddha for a moment'. When you concentrate on 'now and here', even for a second – that's *satori*.

"*Samu* is just another way of walking the path of the Buddha. When you eat, think 'I am eating'. When you sit, think 'I am sitting'. When you walk, think 'I am walking'. It is hard at first, but eventually it becomes easier and you can do it for longer and longer. S*hugyō* trains us to keep this up for twenty-four hours a day."

He walks over to make sure that the incense burner is lit, and adds a pinch of fragrant incense to the keep the coals burning. When he comes back, we stand for several minutes in silence in the darkened hall, watching the unsui and listening to the heavy summer rain falling on the roof overhead.

Under Pressure

Two days out of every ten (days ending in the numbers four and nine) are designated rest days. On these days, morning zazen is cancelled, giving the unsui an extra half-hour to sleep in. On the afternoons before these rest days, unsui who are no longer

restricted to the temple grounds can leave Sōjiji to go on personal errands in Tsurumi, provided they have finished their responsibilities for the day and have received permission to do so. The monks have at most two hours of free time to spend, so they tend to stay in the immediate vicinity of the temple. Still, on these days it is a common sight to spot Sōjiji unsui, still in their monastic robes, shopping for toiletries or browsing the comic book section of the local used bookstore.

On all other days, the unsui are left to steal a few minutes of break and rest where they can get it. Most departments in the temple have a break room where the unsui can have a few moments to relax, smoke a cigarette (a surprising number of the monks are habitual smokers) or to lay down for a quick nap. The break rooms serve almost as "safe zones" for the unsui. They are placed well beyond the sight of temple visitors, and even the unsui's superiors take a more permissive attitude towards monastic protocol while in these rooms. The result is that the monks of all levels have a chance to relax their posture and have surprisingly casual conversation with one another.

The break rooms are themselves non-descript, often having a motley assortment of sitting mats and chairs brought in from elsewhere in the temple, and possibly a low table. Perhaps the most ubiquitous features of the break rooms were clocks and ashtrays.

Like the Monk's Hall, the break rooms are treated by the monks as a special space, but for opposite reasons. Whereas the Monk's Hall is special because of the strict discipline it commands, the break room is valued for the absence of discipline. I was occasionally allowed to hang out with the monks in the break rooms, but I could feel that my presence was often off-putting and barely tolerated by those who saw me – a non-

Japanese, non-monk, who put them on the spot with constant questions – as an intrusion into this "sacred", private space.

At first, I tried to capitalize off of the air of informality by freely asking the monks about their life and experiences at Sōjiji. However, I soon realized that while in the break rooms, the monks were actually trying to *distance* themselves from their lives as monastics, even for a moment. My questioning forced them back into the role of "monk". In order for my presence not to be an intrusion into the protective bubble of the break room, I had to drop my questions. I had to remember that at least here, I was not dealing with the unsui as I knew them.

As a non-monastic, my continuous presence in the temple made me something of an anomaly to the unsui, and most of our interactions were tinged with an inescapable air of protocol and formality. In the break room, however, things could be different. Our conversations revealed a social side of the monks that I had been unable to capture in any other part of the temple complex. Conversation topics in the break room were never over matters of religious significance, but over the things that are of importance to Japanese men in their early twenties. The unsui would talk animatedly about their favorite bands or movies, or about neighborhoods or clubs at which they used to hang out. When it came out that two unsui who had been working side-by-side for weeks had a similar taste in hardcore punk music, they both ran to grab paper and pens to write down the artists that they wanted the other to listen to when they left the temple. Another unsui had an encyclopedic knowledge of NBA teams and players, and told me that he hoped one day to get to see the Lakers play. Wakamatsu and I would talk often of his wish to travel to Europe and the US, and he would ask me questions in preparation for a hypothetical trip

that he would take when he left Sōjiji (he had just received his first passport days before he left home for his training).

The conversations in the break room reminded the unsui (and me) that there was a world "out there" outside of Sōjiji and that the extreme limitations of their *shugyō* (which prohibits listening to music or watching television) are only a temporary condition. In this regard, the break room was the single greatest foil to the disciplinary apparatus of the Monk's Hall; the limited minutes spent in the break room not only reinforced the monk's individuality and humanity, but a sense that *shugyō* was a something that had to be endured for the time being.

Still, for some, the pressures of the monastic life at Sōjiji are too much to bear, even with these periods of calm. While sitting in the break room, my informants told me in hushed tones that within the past year, there had been seven unsui who fled from the temple. Later research indicated that this number is on par with a yearly average of between five to ten escapes a year, down from an average of twenty in the 1980s.

Most escapes take place at night while the temple is asleep. Seldom does escape take place without careful planning. A monk bent on escaping will have made preparations in secret to set his plan into motion. In most cases, the unsui will leave all of their personal belongings behind to facilitate their escape. The doors to the temple are opened when the early-rising monks wake up at 2:30 am, so provided a monk is able to leave the Monk's Hall unnoticed, they are literally able to run out the front door of the monastery, their black robes allowing them to blend into the night.

The escapee is likely terrified at what he has done. A successful escape attempt will have disastrous ramifications for the monk in question, and any future he might have

in the sect. This stigma extends to the priest who sponsored his application to his temple, in most cases the monk's father. This priest will be obliged to submit a formal apology to the temple and sectarian administrative headquarters on behalf of his disciple, but the damage to the reputation of both will already have been done. Should the disciple sincerely want to continue as a monk – or should his obligations to the family temple make his renouncing the clergy an impossibility – and should the Sōtō administration accept his appeal, the unsui might try his *shugyō* again from the very beginning, this time at a smaller, regional training center.

While it would have been interesting from a research perspective, for obvious reasons I never had the chance to speak with a successful escapee, or even one in the planning stages. In interviews, I asked several long-time resident monks about reasons that would lead a person to flee from Sōjiji. A commonly heard response was that an unsui committed to escaping was likely subject to bullying or outright hazing by his fellow monks or his superiors.

An increase in reports of bullying in schools and the workplace has in recent years become a hot button topic in the Japanese media. In many ways, the potential for discipline to descend into abuse represents the darker side of *shugyō*. While I was performing my research, there was a much publicized case of a young sumo trainee who was beaten to death in the course of his training by his superiors and teachers who used metal baseball bats to "toughen" the boy up. When the circumstances of his death came to light, the owner of the school told the media that such extreme training techniques were common in sumo stables – it was the *shugyō* that they endured to become champions. Blame for the death was placed on the boy, who it was argued simply did not

have the mental or physical toughness to make it through the *shugyō*. It was later revealed that the boy had endured daily abuse for an extended period of time.

In previous times, one priest reported, an unsui at Sōjiji could not go through the day without at least fifty hits from the *kyōsaku*, resulting in horrible and painful bruising. In another interview, a priest punched his open palm to capture the sound of the physical abuse that an unsui might endure for any infraction of the rules, which were often minor. Another priest that I interviewed at his own temple actually began to rock back and forth and shake while recalling the daily abuse that he endured.

All, however, agreed that any abuse in the temple was previously much worse than it is today, following new policies and careful monitoring by the Sōjiji administration. The temple administration listens carefully to any allegations of abuse, under the premise that "if it leaves the impression of bullying, then it *is* bullying." Still, such abuse can only be rectified if the unsui speaks up, which even today many are reluctant to do.

Despite this darker side of *shugyō*, former trainees at Sōjiji often report that their most memorable experiences at the temple were the sensation of being pushed beyond the boundaries of physical and mental limitations. The often-painful realities of *shugyō*, with all of demands required of the unsui's body and mind, was commonly remembered with fondness, though several were quick to admit these memories are pleasant only in hindsight. "The things that are in front of your eyes are quite difficult", one priest told me.

I Love Party People

Throughout Japan, the summer Ōbon festival is a time of homecomings, celebrated by feasting, drinking and dancing. During Ōbon, the spirits of one's ancestors and departed family, especially those who have died within the past year, are believed to return to the world to visit the living.

Customs and the timing of the holiday vary from region to region,[12] but throughout Japan, Ōbon rivals the New Years celebration as one of the busiest times of the year for Buddhist temples and their clergy. Clergy are hired by parishioners to perform *tanagyō*, an act by which the priest reads various religious texts in front of the household ancestral altar (*butsudan*) for the benefit of the ancestors enshrined within. As described in the previous chapter, *tanagyō* was adopted by the Tokugawa government as a pretense for the Buddhist priest to inspect parishioner's houses and verify that their ancestral altars bore no sign of Christian iconography or worship. Today, however, the surveillance aspect has vanished from *tanagyō*, leaving only the force of tradition behind to perpetuate the practice.

With five thousand parishioner families to minister to, Sōjiji's monks will be run ragged working to accommodate them all. In the first twelve days of July, the unsui are dispatched in groups of threes to the homes of Sōjiji parishioners all over Tokyo and Kanagawa Prefecture. During this period, each unsui team will visit between twenty and thirty parishioner homes a day, a mad dash that allows them to stay for no more than ten

[12] Ōbon is observed from the thirteenth through the fifteenth of July in the Kantō region. Elsewhere in Japan, it is observed on the thirteenth through the fifteenth of August.

or fifteen minutes in each home. For most, this is their very first excursion outside of the temple precincts since they arrived in March, but they have little time to enjoy it.

Those unsui that stay behind at Sōjiji do not have it any easier. The temple must continue to function as normal: rituals must be performed, food must be prepared, the temple halls must be cleaned, and records and finances must be maintained as if it was any other day. The entire temple community is mobilized for the effort. Some monks are assigned to graveside sutra-chanting services, while others struggle to keep on top of the overwhelming volume of orders for memorial tablets coming in from families visiting the temple for *ohakamairi* (grave visitation), each of which must be painstakingly hand written. Other monks serve in receiving and assisting guests or directing human and vehicular traffic within the temple grounds.

With sleep at an all time low – less than three hours a night for many of the unsui – exhaustion can be seen on everyone's faces. This is but a small taste of what awaits the unsui in their future roles as custodians of their own parish temple, when they will be responsible for overseeing the ritual needs of hundreds of families during the Ōbon holiday with in many cases at most a single assistant. By the time the Ōbon holiday ends on July 16, many of the unsui have grown hoarse or lost their voices entirely from a combination of the exhaustion and the days' worth of chanting they have done.

Yet, despite the whirlwind of activity, the unsui have reason to look forward to the Ōbon holiday. Ōbon marks the end of the summer retreat period, and the end of the hundred day-long probationary period during which they were forbidden from leaving the temple grounds or receiving mail and phone calls from family and friends. This is a major milestone in the life of an unsui at Sōjiji, and certainly one worth celebrating.

The normally tranquil temple garden is transformed during the three nights of the Bon Dance, which lasts from July 17 through 19. The main approach to the temple is lined on either side with colorful booths and the smells of frying eggs, noodles and octopus, culinary staples of Japanese festivals. From the street into the temple complex, a long train of thousands of people are crammed into a space that sees only a handful at a time on most days of the year. It is impossible to move of your own will, and you quickly fall into rhythm of the crowd.

The crowd pushes towards Sōjiji's main parking lot, which has been converted into a space for dancing. In the center of the lot an elevated, circular stage with a large drum in the center. The stage is adorned with the pattern of alternating red and white stripes that are common in celebratory contexts in Japan. Large speakers and flashing lights are mounted on the stage, and long strings of multicolored flags extend outwards and are attached to poles on the outside of the parking lot.

This year, as every year, the Bon festivities are planned by a joint committee of unsui and a group from Tsurumi Girl's High School. In many ways, the Sōjiji Bon dance is truly a festival for the young. Young men and women of high-school and college age are everywhere – the girls are wearing traditional summer *yukata*, boys are dressed in fashionable street clothes.

Families, especially those with young children, have staked out space on tarps or blankets they have brought for the occasion. The children are the most "traditionally" dressed of any group at the festival, with their parents going out of their way to dress their children in *yukata* and traditional wooden shoes.

The monks, too, have given up their robes for the festival. Those monks who have assigned tasks during the dance, such as wading among the crowd to hand out fans or selling beer and alcohol from under a tent across from the stage, are wearing their comfortable *samue* pants and Sōjiji souvenir t-shirts embroidered with the *kanji* for "Zen." Other monks, wearing *yukata*, are tasked with getting the attendees to dance. This often means the monks spend a good deal of time chatting up clusters of girls, and occasionally leading them by the hand into the dancing circles.

It is hard to get people to dance. Some well-known songs are played back-to-back in order to get the attendees to stay in the circles. It is clear that there are certain songs that are more popular than others, and after a while the deejay begins to realize that only certain songs will get the people into the dancing rings. After a while, the same three songs are played over and over, and sometimes back to back.

Elsewhere in the temple, the paved path that runs through the center of the complex is lined with small paper cups, each with a single candle burning inside them. On each and every one of the hundreds of cups a name is written: the candles are tiny memorials purchased in remembrance of a loved one, family member or friend. In other parts of Japan, the candles are commonly sent off by water to ferry the soul to the "other shore" for another year. Here, the candles are kept close, arranged in a pattern that illuminates the path to the Buddha Hall. Very few people walk among the candles, choosing instead to join in the revelry elsewhere in the temple.

As the sun sets, fireworks are set off in the sky over the festival. The end of the fireworks is the limit for many families with tired children. As the families leave, they are replaced by young adults for whom the party is just beginning.

After eight o'clock, the deejay adds a new song to the dance rotation: it is the recent debut hit by the pop rapper DJ Ozma, "*Age Age Every Kinshi*" – a play on words which translates as "Give It to Me Every Night". With the unmistakable opening bars of the song, the crowd of partygoers cheers and rushes into the dancing circles. The Sōjiji monks choreographed and practiced the dance that is featured in the song's music video, and as the song plays, they take the stage and position themselves in the first circle to perform and dance with the crowd. The crowd sings along to the lyrics:

Bari bari, Sunday night *Rabu rabu, Monday night* *Mote mote, Tuesday night* *Wednesday night, o-rai!* *I need you, I want you –* *Nan to iu?* *(Yeah baby, yeah baby!)*	Rearing to go on Sunday night Lovey-dovey on Monday night Popular on Tuesday night Wednesday night, all right! I need you, I want you – What do you say? (*Yeah baby, yeah baby!*)
Ike ike, Friday night *Nuge nuge, Saturday night* *Age age, every night* *Iin ja nai?* *Konya odorikurue hadaka de!*	Let's go on Friday night Get naked on Satuday night Give it to me every night Isn't it good? Tonight, let's be naked and dance like crazy!

I knew this song. During the annual New Year's Eve music program on NHK in 2006, DJ Ozma had sparked a firestorm of controversy after his background dancers made good on the song's lyrics by losing their tops in the middle of the performance, and stripping naked at the end. While NHK later clarified that the dancers were wearing bodysuits and had not technically been naked at any time during the performance, public outrage and a record number of complaints led DJ Ozma to make a formal, public apology.

The unsui keep their clothes on, but no song is more popular – or able to get the crowd involved – than "Age Age Every Kinshi". When the song ends, the cheering from the crowd is explosive, and the monks ride the energy like rock stars.

One of the monks on the stage jumps up on the railing, balancing himself precariously over the crowd. He's wearing a clown wig – reminiscent of DJ Ozma's bleached "Afro" hairstyle – and raps into the microphone:

"Say Dai-hon-zan!" The audience shouts back, "Dai-hon-zan!"

"Say Sō-ji-ji!" "Sō-ji-ji!", they echo.

"Say Tsu-ru-mi!" "Tsu-ru-mi!", they call back.

Another monk with a microphone climbs onto the railing, and the two of them start an energetic freestyle rap. I can't tell if their act is practiced or spontaneous, but the crowd loves them. After a while, the audience starts clapping to the monks' beat, and cheers erupt when they finish. The deejay immediately starts "Age Age Every Kinshi" over from the beginning, keeping the energy alive. The deejay tries following up the song with one of the traditional and family-friendly dance songs that were popular earlier in the night. The crowd immediately begins drifting away; it's obvious that fewer in the crowd know these traditional dances and songs then they do DJ Ozma.

After "Age Age" is repeated for the fourth time, I remove myself from the dancing circle and start walking down towards the main gate, heading for home. As I pass the Baijūan, I find Nakano-rōshi sitting on a picnic bench, comfortably leaning against the table behind him, arms folded across his chest. It's the first time I've ever seen him out of his monk's robes, wearing instead a blue *samue*. From his seat, he can

see both the large crowds dancing in the parking lot and the light trickle of people who are walking up the illuminated pathway to the Butsudan.

I greet him and sit down on the bench next to him. He asks me if I'm having a good time. I reply that I am. He nods. There is something about the smile on his face that I can't quite place.

As we sit, we chat idly about the weather (warm and humid, but better than the previous night) and the large crowd of people still milling about. When the DJ Ozma song comes on for a fifth time, I ask him over the noise from the crowd who decided to include the song. The unsui chose it themselves, he replies. I tell him that I'm surprised that they would choose a song like this for Ōbon.

Nakano sighs. "I don't think it's a good thing," he says. "I'm happy everyone is having fun, but they've forgotten why this festival was started in the first place." It's not just the unsui, he tells me: the people of Tsurumi have forgotten it too.

"Sōjiji started hosting the *Mitama Matsuri* (Spirit Festival), right after the war. When Tsurumi was bombed, Sōjiji was lucky – it wasn't damaged. But the damage to the rest of the city was so bad that some people couldn't even find the bodies of their loved ones. They were buried in their houses, or burned up by the flames. People would lay out the dead bodies here [he gestures to indicate the entire temple precincts], so their families could find them and give them a proper funeral.

"However, there were so many bodies that were never found. In order to calm their spirits, Sōjiji began the *Mitama Matsuri*. The point of the dancing was to remind the people that in the face of great tragedy, the other side of life is happiness.

"In the first years after the war, the *matsuri* was a way for the unsui and people of Tsurumi to come together to celebrate being alive and rebuilding the town. The slogan back then was '*ichidō machi yo!*' ("The town is all together!") I think that those of us who have never known war need to remember what has happened in the past.

"But," he says with a smile and a shrug, "the unsui do something like this every year. It's their way of rebelling. In time, they'll come to understand."

Chapter III

Sōryo

Instructions from the Cook

When Kodama introduced me to the women who worked in the temple gift shop as "Dōgen-zenji," I was deeply bothered. I knew he had a sense of humor, but I didn't yet know him well enough to tell if he was mocking me, or if he was just trying to be funny. What was the comparison anyway? Was he commenting on the fact that I had become a daily fixture at Sōjiji? Did he think I was being too serious about my research?

Kodama was one of the first monks at Sōjiji with whom I developed a deeper friendship that extended beyond the temple walls. Kodama had been at Sōjiji for nearly a decade, and was older than the incoming unsui by about eight years or so. He had a round face, and his mustard-brown *kesa* – the color of a fully ordained priest – hid a healthy plumpness that was not shared by the training unsui. When I met him, the very first thing I noticed about him was that he did not wear the black thick-rimmed glasses like the younger novices. Rather, he wore clear, round frames that gave him the likeness of a bald John Lennon. I never mentioned this to him, but I think he would have liked the comparison.

Kodama was a consummate storyteller. He took great pleasure in connecting with the visitors who came to Sōjiji, and he would often stay behind after a ceremony to give a brief sermon to the people sitting in the open area at the rear of the Daisodō. If he felt he had a large enough audience, he would send an unsui to fetch an over-the-shoulder PA system, and he would stand in a well-trafficked area to preach to anyone who would listen.

In both his sermons and his conversation, Kodama masterfully played at double entendre and used Japanese and even English homophones to great effect to make his points. When he really got going, his speaking was fast, animated, and often interlaced with pantomime, funny faces and sound effects. He would often carry a sketch pad with him, on which he would draw cute bears and other animals playing the parts of the characters that featured in his stories. At other times, he would pull magic tricks and joke props from the pockets in his robe sleeves: an oversized rubber ear one day, a set of magnets the next, even large stuffed animals were somehow produced from the deep folds of his robes.

He was a very tactile speaker, often snapping his fingers, touching his tongue or pinching his arm to illustrate his messages about the way humans interact with the sensory worlds. He was deeply respectful of his temple, but he could be surprisingly mischievous as well: sometimes, he would put his arm around statues, or casually toy with temple objects, like patrolling the meditation hall with a giant spoon held like a *kyōsaku*. If you asked him, he was happy to tell you that any discomfort you felt at the way he handled temple objects had more to do with your own preconceptions, and less to do with any latent special qualities of the objects themselves. The ritual objects of the

temple were expensive and finely made, but they were ultimately analogues of more mundane objects. The stylized *nioi* scepter carried by priests had begun its symbolic life in India as a backscratcher: why should a fancy *nioi* be given any better treatment than the pink plastic backscratchers you can buy at any 100-yen shop?

In the time that I knew him at Sōjiji, Kodama worked in the temple kitchens. While his role was subordinate to the temple cook (*tenzo*), the priest who held the office at the time was famous throughout Japan for his *shōjin ryori* vegetarian cooking, and in reality spent very little time at Sōjiji. The day-to-day operations of the kitchens therefore fell to Kodama, who bore the responsibility of ensuring that there was always enough food prepared for the more than two hundred people in the temple community (including the lay employees and any visiting groups) and that the community was served exactly on time, three times each day.

In Kodama, my ethnographic inquisitiveness was met by a priest who wanted to share his experience and knowledge. I never knew if he sought me out himself or if he was put up to the task by his superiors, but Kodama was one of the first to volunteer to answer any questions that I had about Sōjiji or Zen. Yet, in the tradition of the best anthropological informants, Kodama's assistance was often as infuriating as it was instructive. He would habitually answer my questions with ambiguity, with playfulness, with misdirection, with allegory. It was surprisingly rare to get a straight answer from him.

And so it went for many months. It was only after complaining to my fiancée following a particularly frustrating question-and-answer session with Kodama that she brought me to realize that I needed to reevaluate the way in which I had been relating to

him and the information he was giving me. After listening to my frustration, my fiancée told me matter-of-factly that I had been focusing too hard on *what* he was saying, without paying enough attention to *how* he was saying it. Kodama, my fiancée pointed out, was answering my questions like a good Zen teacher should. My problem was that I just wasn't listening correctly.

She was right. The Zen literary canon is full of examples of teachers giving enlightened answers to questions posed by brash (and therefore, unenlightened) students in ways that are easily misunderstood by the student at the time as dismissive or even nonsensical. Upon deeper reflection, however, the student comes to understand the gem of wisdom that had been masked by what only appeared to be playfulness or ambiguity. Indeed, the tradition of meditating upon *koan*, the so-called "riddles" posed by famous Zen masters, is based on this very principle: it is only when the student learns to move beyond words and superficial distinctions that true understanding can begin. Though the Sōtō Zen sect no longer stresses *koan* practice from a doctrinal perspective, the dramatic dialogues found in biographies of Sōtō masters still serve an important role in the sect's history and identity.

Kodama, for his part, was expertly participating in this historical tradition in the role of teacher. However unknowingly, I was also playing my role perfectly: as the blustering and frustrated student. But as I would later discover, there was another dimension to the story being shared by Kodama and myself.

According to autobiographical and hagiographical accounts of Dōgen's life, Dōgen was dissatisfied with Japanese Buddhism and left Japan in 1223 in order to discover for himself the True Dharma as it existed in the great temples of Song China.

Upon his arrival in the port of Quinyuan, Dōgen describes a fortuitous meeting with the cook of a nearby monastery who had come aboard Dōgen's boat in hopes of purchasing Japanese mushrooms from the travelers. Dōgen, sensing ethnographic opportunity, invites the cook to tea and begins to ask a series of probing questions of the monk's life and work at the monastery. When Dōgen tries to extend the interview by offering to buy the monk dinner, the monk politely, but firmly refuses:

> "If I do not oversee the preparations for tomorrow's meal offering, it will not turn out well." [Dōgen] said, "Are there not co-workers in the monastery who understand the meals? What will be deficient if only one officer, the cook, is not present?" The cook said, "I took up this position in my later years, it is this old man's pursuit of the way. How could I hand it over to others? Besides, when I came, I did not ask to stay away overnight."
>
> [Dōgen] again asked the cook: "You are venerable in years; why don't you sit in meditation to pursue the way or contemplate the words of the ancients? It is troublesome being cook; all you do is labor. What good is that?" (Foulk 2001: 9)

Dōgen's brash questioning is met with laughter from the cook: "My good man from a foreign country, you do not yet understand the pursuit of the way and do not yet know about written words!" The cook's response shocks and shames Dōgen, who immediately asks about "written words" and "pursuit of the way". The cook cryptically replies that "if you do not slip up and pass by the place you ask about, how could you not be a man?" Dōgen admits that he does not know what this means (Foulk 2001: 9).

Months later, Dōgen and the cook meet again. Again, Dōgen brings up the topic of "written words" and "pursuit of the way". The cook's response is again cryptic, but Dōgen is now in a place to grasp the deeper wisdom behind the cook's words. Dōgen understands that the work of the temple cook – indeed, the work of any temple officer or administrator – may be time-consuming and mundane, but if one approaches their job as *shugyō*, it is a viable path to true enlightenment. In this, cooking in the kitchens for

twelve hours a day is no different from sitting for hours in the meditation hall in the pursuit of enlightenment.

When Kodama introduced me to the women at the gift shop, did he actually think I was a modern-day Dōgen? No. But as I would come to understand, the famous encounter between Dōgen and the Chinese temple cook provided a unique historical archetype by which my ethnographic research and relentless questioning could be reimagined to provide new layers of significance for researcher and informant, for student and teacher. Kodama and I would spend many hours together, both inside and outside Sōjiji's walls. As Dōgen would write of his own informant, "The little I know about written words and understand about pursuing the way is due to the great kindness of that cook" (Foulk 2001: 10).

◆◆

In the previous chapter, I looked at the ways in which novice priests are subjected to the disciplining forces that will one day make them into Sōtō Zen priests (*sōryo*). In this chapter, I will look at the clergy from the "other side" of their time spent at Sōjiji to ask: how does a successful temple *shugyō* – a successful disciplining – transform a person from a docile body into a fully-vested representative of the Sōtō Zen tradition?

Key to this transformation, I argue, is the participatory reenactment of ritual: even more so than as novice unsui, priests are legitimated in the eyes of the sect and the public only insofar as they can appear as legitimate embodiments of the teachings of Sōtō Zen. The rituals of ordination are therefore not mere performances. Rather, the rituals of

ordination operate on two levels: first, through the bodily reenactment of important moments of the Sōtō Zen religious history with the priests in the roles of key historical figures; and second, by allowing priests to recreate these moments anew, allowing them to both participate – as well as perpetuate – this history.

At the same time, the realities and obligations of contemporary Japanese society have had dramatic consequences for a priest's identity both inside and outside the context of Sōjiji. As we shall see, the past hundred years in particular has had very important ramifications for the day-to-day life of a post-training priest trying to reconcile their traditional roles as renunciant priests with their modern lives lived very much "in the world." As fully-ordained priests negotiate their roles as professional clerics, they find themselves responsible for the well-being of their families and their parishioners, the continued survival of their sect and *honzan,* and the training of future generations of clergy. How does a priest's time in *shugyō* help (or hinder) him in his performance of his duties?

Descending the Mountain

An unsui's *shugyō* at Sōjiji is by far the most time-consuming part of the ordination process, taking a minimum of six months to as long as several years, depending on an individual's experience and educational background. *Shugyō* at a training temple will be far and away the most restrictive time in a priest's life: his movement, communication, diet, and daily schedule are all severely regimented, in the intention of molding the unsui from a soft docile body into a trained and disciplined

priest. Not surprisingly, most unsui are anxious to get this part of the process over and done with, as soon and as fast as possible. Many are the unsui who count down the days to their *sōan* ("leaving the retreat") celebration, the day they finally "descend the mountain" (*asan*)[1] and return to a world without the strict discipline of the Monk's Hall.

While an unsui who has fulfilled his required duration of training can schedule his departure at any time, there is usually a pressure for priests to schedule their departure after any major ceremonies or holidays that occur around their intended departure date. Because of this, larger groups of unsui (sometimes upwards of ten or fifteen at a time) tend to depart together.

On the afternoon before they leave, the unsui will go around to each temple department to formally thank the department head for his time and care during their training. The unsui stand as a group in gasshō, and shout to the closed door that they have come to pay their respects. The department head will emerge, and offer a few words of congratulations and encouragement not to forget the lessons they have learned. Shouting as one, they thank him for his time, apologize for their intrusion, and move on to the next department.

On the morning of their departure, the unsui will participate in the morning rituals and breakfast as usual. After breakfast, they will prepare themselves in the manner of travelling monks – robes tucked for ease of movement, straw sandals on their feet, their traveling bags suspended on their chests and backs. At eight o'clock, the entire temple community gathers in the front of the temple reception hall, and takes up positions lining

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[1] The *kanji* for "descending the mountain" is 下山, which can be read either as '*gezan*' (more common) or '*asan*' (less common). In usage, however, the two words have very different meanings. *Asan* can best be thought of as an "honorable discharge" from one's training. *Gezan*, however, has the opposite meaning, implying that the person in question was dishonorably dismissed from the monastery for violating the rules.

both sides of the driveway. The departing unsui will emerge, holding their wide-brimmed straw hats in their right hands, and their *zafu* cushions under their left arms. As they arrived, so shall they leave.

The unsui are greeted by cheers and applause from the community as they emerge from the hall. From the side, several monks place cellophane-wrapped bouquets of brightly colored flowers into the unsuis' already full hands. A ranking priest, usually one of their teachers, stands on the wooden stairs of the interior of the hall, and addresses the graduating unsui through a handheld PA system. "We are proud of you, and what you have accomplished here. We are a family, and you will always be welcome to come home."

When the priest's congratulatory speech is finished, the graduating unsui walk down the hill towards the Sanmon to the applause of their peers. As they pass through the gauntlet of smiling friends, the two lines collapse behind them, following them down the driveway. At the Sanmon, the entire community poses for several commemorative pictures, with the graduating unsui in the center of the group.

When the pictures are finished, all of the unsui (but not the ranking priests, who will remain behind on the steps of the Sanmon to gaze proudly at their students going out into the world) will join the graduates in their final walk to the Sanshōkan, the wooden gate that serves as the formal boundary between Sōjiji and the outside world. In one of the most meaningful footsteps of their lives, the graduates will step over the wooden threshold of the gate, symbolically stepping out of their lives as training monks. The crowd around them erupts into cheers, as the closest well-wishers pat the graduates on

their backs and shake their hands. Small groups then grab each unsui and throw them three times into the air.

After lingering for a couple of minutes with the graduates, the crowd of unsui turns back and runs up the hill in order to be on time for their morning cleaning duties. The graduates remain at the Sanshōkan so that the temple photographer can take several more commemorative photos.

My first time witnessing the *sōan* ceremony was for ten monks, one of whom was Nakajima. I positioned myself just out of the action, following well behind the unsui as they celebrated their friends' departures. When the crowd of unsui left the graduates to return to their duties, I positioned myself by the street entrance to the temple to take several dramatic shots of the unsui reemerging into the world. I expected to follow the graduates as they walked through downtown Tsurumi to the train station. I had even plotted out in advance the photographic angles I wanted to use capture these "juxtaposition of the traditional with the modern" pictures that I had envisioned.

I watched the temple photographer finish and turn back up the hill, carrying his tripod. The graduates lingered for several moments. I readied my camera for the first of my pictures.

And then they turned around.

The graduates, having stepped over the threshold, had symbolically reemerged from their *shugyō* into the mundane world. The "departure" thus completed, the now-graduated monks walked back up the hill into the temple complex, retracing their steps into the reception hall, as if they had forgotten something.

I gave chase, thinking that perhaps they were just going back for more photographs. A monk greeted them at the gate to collect their borrowed straw hats. The graduates took off their straw sandals, stepped into their old slippers, and disappeared back into the temple halls.

I walked into the temple shop with a look of confusion on my face. I asked one of the women who worked there if the unsui were actually leaving. She pointed to a pile of plastic crates and bedding bundles in the corner, all tagged and ready for pickup from a special delivery service. The graduates were simply waiting for their rides from parents, relatives or friends who would come to the temple to pick them up.

The *sōan* ceremony, like the *jōzan* ritual, is a symbolic mixture of traditional appearance and modern convenience. As they arrived, so shall they leave.

I was able to catch up with Nakajima before he left with his mother, who had arrived by train the night before. They were on a tight schedule, having purchased bullet train tickets that would have them home by mid-afternoon. He told me how excited he was to see his family and friends for the first time in over a year. He expected that his "welcome home" party tonight would be a lot of fun.

As several "newly-free" unsui would describe to me, the return to a non-monastic lifestyle is filled with a sense of liberation and relief. One expressed great satisfaction in the knowledge that he would never be forced to wake up before sunrise to sit zazen again. Another informant relished the fact that his first act upon leaving the temple was having a hamburger at the McDonald's that sits on the corner of the busy street which leads up to Sōjiji: "It made my stomach hurt, but every time I passed that McDonald's, all I could think of was how much I wanted a hamburger!"

Still, for many monks, the transition to life outside of the monastery is a difficult one, similar to the return experienced by others who have been through an intense liminal and communal experience such as military service or college. One middle-aged priest reported that when he finally went home after spending almost a year and a half at Sōjiji (a time which, in retrospect, seemed to him as "too short") he was surprised to find himself depressed and lethargic. He began with good intentions to continue his training at home, but he soon found that he was unable to maintain his disciplined schedule as he had wanted: his commitment to daily zazen had fallen away within a month, and soon after he experienced difficulty waking up in the mornings to oversee his ritual obligations to the ancestors his temple's parishioners. Over time, he reported, he came to terms with his difficulties but only through compromise: he decided to forgo daily zazen entirely, and that he would wake up at seven to perform his morning duties. Whatever personal disappointment this priest felt, his compromise is common enough. Despite the public image of Zen as being meditative practice above all else, most fully ordained Zen priests will rarely, if ever, sit zazen outside of a monastic context.

Other priests I spoke with reported similar dissonance between their lives at Sōjiji and their new lives outside of the temple. The most common sentiment was a sense of missing the communal life of the training temple: "Without the feeling of camaraderie (*nakama ishiki*), daily life just isn't the same," one priest told me. Similarly, finding oneself outside of the perpetual gaze of the temple's tutelary guardians and their human "enforcers" enables one to justify lapses in discipline. But the absence of the disciplining gaze also means that daily life begins to lack structure, and in some cases, even meaning.

As soldiers and students can attest, a regimented life is easiest to maintain in a group, all of whom function under continuous disciplinary pressure.

The Long Path to Priesthood

The Sōtō Zen sect recognizes that one is already a priest (*Sōryo*) once tonsure has been performed. Still, becoming a fully-ordained Sōtō Zen priest is a fairly straightforward affair marked by four primary initiatory rituals, of which of tonsure is only the first step along the "path of the Buddha". From the time the paperwork certifying tonsure is processed and approved by the central administrative offices, the newly-minted priest will have ten years to complete the remainder of the initiatory process. This road can be very long for some, but most priests will aim to receive full ordination within two to four years after tonsure.

Following tonsure, the novice priest is given the title of *jōza* ("ascending the seat"), a term which refers to a priest's entrance into the monastic life in a training temple. The months or years that a priest will spend cloistered as an unsui at a training temple like Sōjiji or Eiheiji is by far the most time-consuming and personally-trying part of the initiation process.

Successful completion of *shugyō* of any duration is a significant accomplishment in a priest's life. Informally, there will be celebrations with friends and family to mark the priest's homecoming, as the hardest part of a priest's training is behind him.

Following his period of *shugyō*, a priest will likely be anywhere from six months to two years along in his clerical career. From this point, the remaining three initiatory

rituals will usually be scheduled to take place in rapid succession, often with only the space of a few months separating them. All that is officially required for a priest to undergo the remaining rituals is the timely submission to the Sōtō Zen sect's administrative offices of the necessary documents for each successive stage. When the official approval is received by the applicant, the ritual can move forward at the convenience of the priest and his sponsor.

Dharma Combat

Completing the monastery training requirement makes the priest eligible to participate in the second initiatory ritual, the "Dharma combat ceremony" (*hossenshiki*, or more formally, *risshin*, "standing body").

In a training monastery like Sōjiji, the title of "first seat" (*shuso*) is given to the monk who is elected by his peers to serve as the primary representative for the community of training monks.[2] In previous times, the monk who was granted the honor of serving as *shuso* was the one who was recognized as the most likely candidate to inherit the Dharma lineage of the Zen master. While it remains a position of great prestige at a large training monastery, it has largely become a ceremonial role, with few everyday responsibilities.

[2] The *shuso* is the representative of the community of unsui, and is distinguished visually by his black and white *kesa*, which contrasts with the standard black kesa. The *shuso* is elected by his peers, and is usually a monk who has been at Sōjiji for an extended period of time. In previous times, the role of *shuso* was given many more responsibilities than the position holds now. Today, it is similar to a valedictorian, with only nominal administrative duties. He is elected for the duration of the *angō* retreat period, so of the 150 or so resident unsui at Sōjiji, only two can hold the title per year.

Only two unsui per year will have the honor of performing a Dharma combat ceremony at Sōjiji. For the remainder, their chance will come upon their return to their home temple, where they will be granted the title of *shuso.* Since most priests will go on to inherit a small parish temple, it matters little if the "first seat" is technically the only seat at a given temple; the term *shuso* indicates that the priest is the heir apparent to his sponsor's Dharma lineage.

The Dharma Combat ceremony is intended to be a public demonstration of a fledgling priest's ability to be both a powerful proponent and exemplar of the Sōtō Zen teachings and practices. The historical precedents for the Dharma Combat ceremony date back to India, when the wealthy and powerful would invite rival philosophic schools to engage in public debates. The schools that accepted the patron's invitation would arrive and hoist their school's banner at the gates; two schools simultaneously displaying their banner signified that the debate-battle was underway. These debates could rage for many days, but they would ultimately be judged to have a clear winner and loser. The loser, thus bested, was forced to publicly concede the superiority of the winner's argument. The losing side's flag would then be lowered, leaving only the victor's to wave in the wind.

The historical Buddha and his disciples were likely party to this practice of high-stakes philosophic debating. Over time, the Buddhist canon became filled with stories with examples of the overwhelming power of the sermons of the Buddha and his followers. It was not merely humans who could be swayed by coming into contact with the Dharma; all manner of beings, from gods to animals to demons were won over simply by hearing the Dharma when it was preached by a veritable heir to the Buddha's teaching.

The Sōtō Zen canon, likewise, has many historical precedents for Dharma Combat. Most significant for the Sōjiji-trained clergy is the conversion story of Gasan Jōseki, who would become the second abbot of Sōjiji.

Gasan began his monastic career at Mount Hiei, where, like Dōgen, he trained within the Tendai school. After a chance meeting with Keizan in Kyoto, Gasan challenged Keizan to a *mondō* ("question and answer") debate to determine the merit of the other's teachings. According to biographic sources, Gasan was well-educated and already wise beyond his years, but Keizan had the weight of the True Dharma behind his words. Gasan was so moved by the sheer force of Keizan's arguments that he fell into a personal crisis, ultimately questioning his Tendai training. Some time later, Gasan returned to Keizan to dedicate himself to Sōtō Zen, and became one of Keizan's most eminent disciples (Momose 2002: 144).

Today, the Dharma Combat ceremony symbolically reenacts this proselytizing tradition within Buddhism by publicly placing the soon-to-be ordained priest in a role by which he must demonstrate his ability to personify the teachings of Sōtō Zen to any and all challengers. Like the daily recitations of lineage and key texts in the Monk's Hall, participation in a Dharma combat ritual is multifunctional in that it affirms and preserves key moments of Buddhist – and specifically Sōtō Zen – history, while bodily placing a priest into this tradition through participatory reenactment.

The Dharma Combat is in many ways the equivalent of an oral defense, save that all sides of the exchange are memorized from a standardized text. In this regard, and despite its name, the Dharma Combat ceremony is not "won", but rather performed. In today's Dharma Combat, there are no surprises: the *shuso* will always win.

The Hossenshiki takes place twice a year at Sōjiji, in May and November, in the middle of the summer and winter retreat periods, respectfully. It is an important ritual in the yearly cycle of the temple, and one of the few rituals in which the entire temple hierarchy will participate. As the date of the ritual approaches, the community of monks begins practicing in earnest for the ceremony. In the weeks leading up to the ceremony, the quiet of the temple landscape is broken by the monks practicing their questions, phrased in classical Japanese shouted at the top of their lungs in a gruff and forceful manner.

On the day of the ceremony, the *shuso* enters the hall with the abbot and an entourage of ranking priests, all carrying semi-open fans as a mark of their office. The community of unsui are seated in their usual positions flanking either side of the inner hall, with the *shuso* taking his place in the position closest to the altar in the first row. The abbot sits in the center, facing the altar. Attendants bring a small table and place it in front of the abbot. First an incense burner is placed on the table, and afterwards a three-foot long staff known as a *shippei* is placed in front of the burner. Of all the material trappings used in a Zen temple, the *shippei* is the only one that is literally a weapon: its stylized shape is that of an unstrung bow.

After an opening recitation of the Heart Sutraand offerings made to the Sōtō patriarchs, the Dharma Combat begins in earnest. The *shuso* makes a round of the hall, prostrating in front of the ranking priests, and finally making four prostrations to the assembly: one to the abbot, one to the left, one to the right, and then a second prostration to the abbot. The *shuso* then approaches the abbot, and with his permission takes the *shippei*.

Moving backwards, the *shuso* kneels in seiza in front of the main altar. Spatially, this position is one of importance and also of mediation: in the hall, this position is usually occupied by the statuary of the Sōtō patriarchs who sit above the altar gazing down and out at the assembled community, their faces obscured by curtains and shadow to ensure that the gaze cannot be returned. Today, however, the *shuso* occupies this ritual position: facing out at the assembly from the front of the hall, he is symbolically made the focus of the ceremony (a right normally reserved for the Patriarchs alone), but his placement on the floor is a humbling reminder that the *shuso* is not yet worthy to be counted among the patriarchs.

The *shuso* opens the combat by raising the *shippei* and fan to the level of his eye, a gesture of offering. Holding the fan in his left hand, he takes the *shippei* in his right hand, and slams it with a loud boom into the tatami floor. As he does so, he shouts a strong challenge to the assembly. Dharma Combat has begun.

The challenges come from unsui around the hall, who open their questions with "Oshō!," the equivalent of "Hey, priest!" The challenges are brash: the unsui shout their questions in the deep, threatening voices characteristic of Japanese gangster movies. The back-and-forth exchanges are brief and aggressive on both sides, with each confrontation lasting under a minute. Each exchange ends with a characteristic exchange of "Chinchō!" ("Take care of yourself!) and the response "Banzei!" ("Stay well!"), which the *shuso* punctuates by slamming his *shippei*: the challenger, humbled, is grateful for what he has just learned. The *shuso*, the winner of the debate, is similarly graceful in his victory.

For over an hour, the *shuso* fends off these theological "attacks" by his peers. The challenges come from all directions in seemingly random fashion. It is significant to note

that at no time do the ranking priests offer their own challenges or enter into the fray. For the time being, they are silent observers, watching the *shuso* deftly respond to the attacks on his understanding of the Dharma completely on his own.

Nearing the end of the ceremony, the back-and-forth shouting abruptly ends. The *shuso* returns the *shippei* staff to the table sitting in front of the abbot. Making another set of four prostrations, the *shuso* returns to each of the ranking priests to pay his respects and a prostration, this time in reverse. Emerging from the left side of the hall, the *shuso* takes his place at the head of the assembly of unsui.

Now it is the priests' turn to address the *shuso* and his cohort. Where there was chaos – unsui shouting at each other from random directions – now there is order. The ranking priests speak in turn, in ascending hierarchical order, moving clockwise around the hall, and culminating in a comment from the abbot himself.

The floating, almost musical voices which the ranking priests use to make their comments stand in dramatic contrast to the gruff, angry voices the unsui used to issue their challenges. By responding to his attackers in an appropriately aggressive voice, the *shuso* had met fire with fire, addressing the unenlightened unsui on their own terms. However, this audible shift in tone and language is a performative demonstration that while the *shuso* may show promise, he still has a long way to go. The actual words spoken are congratulatory, but the underlying message from the ranking, experienced priests is clear: enlightened words must issue from disciplined, graceful bodies. It is not enough to "talk the talk" – a Zen priest must also learn to "walk the walk."

That the Dharma Combat ceremony is the capstone event to an unsui's *shugyō* underscores this point. It is very easy to speak the right words, especially if they are

memorized from a book. It is a far more difficult thing to *embody* these words. Ultimately, the *hossenshiki* demonstrates, a priest will be judged not only for the enlightened words he speaks, but moreso on the way his lessons are manifested in his everyday behavior.

Dharma Transmission

Once the *hossenshiki* has been completed, the priest will be elevated to the rank of *zagen*, "principal seat". But he will likely not hold this title for long.

The third initiatory ritual, "Dharma transmission" (*denpō*) often follows within weeks of the *hossenshiki*. Of all of the rituals performed in contemporary Zen temples, few if any share in the mystique that surrounds Dharma transmission. The allure of the Dharma transmission ceremony is somewhat understandable as the ritual is highly secretive by nature: instructions for the conduct of Dharma transmission are not included in the official Sōtō Zen ritual manual, and must be specifically requested from the Sōtō central administration office on a per-case basis. Further, the *denpō* ceremony is conducted behind closed doors, with just two participants: the master and the disciple. Religious texts describe a powerful "mind-to-mind" transmission that binds the two participants, allowing the master to wordlessly impart millennia-old wisdom to his deserving student. The mystery surrounding the ceremony is such that Dharma transmission has received extensive (and perhaps disproportionate) attention in religious, academic (see especially Foulk 1993 and Bodiford 1999, 2000, 2008) and popular literature.

Whatever else takes place behind the closed doors, the *denpō* ceremony is in the first place meant to invoke the archetypal story of the Buddha passing leadership of the fledgling Buddhist community to his disciple Makakashō, as described in the previous chapter. According to the version of the story found in the *Denkōroku*, Keizan writes of the Dharma transmission ceremony that "the 'offering up of a flower' on that occasion has been passed on from ancestor to ancestor; those outside the ancestral line are never allowed to know about it without good cause" (Nearman 2001: 7).

But what is actually transmitted in these secret "Dharma transmission" ceremonies? Foulk, in discussing transmission stories in Song China, describes how "the Dharma transmitted from master to disciple is literally inconceivable: it has no specifiable content and no marks by which it can be recognized" (Foulk 1993: 154). This is not to say that Dharma transmission is "meaningless." Bodiford identifies several layers of significance that underlie modern Dharma transmission ceremonies, arguing that "the spiritual power of Dharma transmission encapsulates these dimensions in a mythological framework, unites them in genealogical terminology, and reveals them through concrete ritual performances" (Bodiford 2008: 269). The significance of the *denpō* ritual in contemporary Sōtō Zen can be found in the two priests – master and disciple, father and son – reenacting this archetypal moment between Shakyamuni and Makakashō. Moreover, both participants are placed into Sōtō Zen history through ritual by reaffirming and recreating a genealogy that extends back over twenty-five centuries.

The logical premises of the Sōtō Zen Dharma transmission ceremony lead to a powerful (if rarely spoken) implication: through his meditative practice, Shakyamuni awakened to the True Dharma, and became the Buddha. The Buddha recognized that

Makakashō also had an awakening, and passed responsibility of the monastic community and preservation of the Dharma to him. Makakashō likewise passed the leadership to Ananda, the second patriarch, and so forth. If one accepts the doctrinal position that the linear transmission of the True Dharma has remained unbroken since its inception to the present day, and if both the administering and recipients are registered and legitimate inheritor to the Dharma, then the receiving priest is, by implication, enlightened.

Through this circularity, a Sōtō Zen priest's "enlightenment" is implied by virtue of the fact that they are legitimately certified recipients of the transmitted Dharma. Rather than being a logical conundrum, the argument's circularity is materially celebrated in the *kechimyaku* lineage chart: a visual representation of Dharma transmission, which circles back upon itself to show that the Buddha is himself a Dharma descendant of the recipient. It is not surprising then that the laity – and particularly non-Japanese Zen practitioners – are inclined to over-idealize the clergy, whose certification documents silently mark the priests as enlightened beings, even if the priests themselves refuse to tacitly do so.

Still, an interesting problem remains: Jihō Sargent estimates that, in order to maintain current levels of clerical operations in the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect, the sect needs to certify transmission of approximately six hundred new priests every year, the majority of them young men between twenty and thirty years old (Sargent 2002: 15). Does it stretch the meaning of "enlightenment" if six hundred young men and women each year can be said to awaken to the same eternal wisdom that launched one of the world's oldest and largest religious movements?

In answering this question, it might surprise the reader as to how rarely *satori*, often perceived to be the purpose or end-goal of Buddhist practice, is actually mentioned

in the context of a Sōtō Zen temple. Not a single priest that I spoke with – of any age, rank, or office – ever referred to themselves or their brethren as having "attained enlightenment" (*satori o eta*, or *satori o hiraita*), nor was *satori* the goal of their practice. Indeed, those few times that a priest did make explicit mention of their epistemological state was to lump themselves with everyone else on earth in sharing the same desires, fears, and weaknesses that make us all human.

In this regard, *satori* is conceived and taught in contemporary Sōtō Zen in quite a different manner than it is commonly portrayed in popular media. A moment of *satori* is a significant event, to be certain, but teachers stress that it is only one's first – and brief – insight into the possibilities of living one's life in a state of perfect and continuous *shugyō*. To confuse it with a phenomenological or existential change-of-state is therefore akin to confusing one's acceptance letter into college as the entirety of a college education.

Instead, the teachers stressed to their subordinates that one is "enlightened" only insofar as their actions and behavior can be said to be enlightened. The *kechimyaku* lineage chart, and the certification of transmission (*inshō*) that is bestowed upon Dharma transmission is therefore not a certification of wisdom, but rather an acknowledgement that the soon-to-be priest has mastered the kinesthetic vocabulary of discipline that will allow them to publically function as a Sōtō Zen clergyman.

"Abbot for a Day"

After receiving the Dharma transmission from his sponsor, a priest becomes eligible for *den'e*, the "changing of the robe." This is, in many ways, purely a cosmetic change: the priest no longer wears the black *kesa* of a novice unsui. The *kesa* he is allowed to wear is changed to a subdued earth tone – brown, mustard, or moss green being the most common colors. These colors are meant to symbolically reference the dirtying (through dirt, mud and other contaminants) of the robes sewn from white funeral shrouds that ancient Indian mendicants would wear to show that they had transcended material concerns of purity or pollution.

At this point, there is only one ritual left before the priest is a fully-ordained Sōtō Zen clergyman. This last ritual is known as *zuise haitō*, in which a priest is required to serve as "abbot for a day" (*ichinichi jūshoku*) at both Sōjiji and Eiheiji.

For nearly six hundred years, the ritual now known as *zuise haitō* was the cornerstone of Sōjiji's rotating abbot system (*rinjūsei*). The rotating abbot system began as a clever means of sharing the responsibility – or, more precisely, the burden – of being abbot of a temple that was both remote and rapidly increasing in size and significance. Sōjiji's rotating abbot system was loosely based on a similarly-named system traditionally employed at the "Five Mountains" public monasteries in China. In actual practice, however, Sōjiji's rotating abbot system was a unique innovation that inadvertently cemented Sōtō Zen – and Sōjiji – as an important player in the religious landscape of Japan.

Sōjiji's unique rotating abbot system was developed in 1390 by the five principle Dharma descendants of Gasan Jōseki (Bodiford 1993: 105). Under the agreement, each of the five Dharma families that inherited Gasan's Dharma line would provide a priest who would serve out a period of residency at Sōjiji. When this priest's term was completed, the abbacy of Sōjiji would move to another Dharma family, who would send their own representative.

In a period where it was customary for clergy to spend twenty years in training before they could receive Dharma transmission, the number of eligible priests was initially very low. Each abbot was required to serve a minimum term of three years at Sōjiji (Nodomi 2007: 6). While he did so, he was required to maintain his home temple as well, which was often hundreds of miles away from Sōjiji's remote location on the Noto Penninsula.

Gasan entreated his disciples to be energetic and active popularizers of Sōtō Zen. His original five disciples likewise transmitted this proselytic spirit to their own students. Throughout the medieval period, Gasan's Dharma descendants spent much of their time traveling the Japanese countryside and actively courting patronage by performing Buddhist funerals and memorial services for the laity (see chapter 6). What was originally a burden turned into an unforeseen boon: having the title of "former abbot of Sōjiji" only served to help the priests' mission, granting an added dimension of prestige and legitimacy. Where these itinerant monks traveled, a new "temple" – often merely a simple wooden construction housing an enshrined image – dedicated to Sōtō Zen would often be founded soon after. Since the founding priests were in Gasan's Dharma line,

these new temples became branch temples of Sōjiji, contributing materially and financially to their parent temple's welfare.

Over the next few centuries, the number of priests eligible to ascend to Sōjiji's abbacy increased exponentially. As the number of eligible abbots skyrocketed, the required residency of the abbacy decreased from three years, to one year, to six months, and finally to a single day. Each of these "abbacies" brought with them substantial monetary donations from the now merely-visiting priest to fill Sōjiji's coffers.[3]

By the first temple censuses in the eighteenth century, Sōtō Zen proselytization efforts throughout Japan had created an impressive network of temples founded and populated by "former abbots" who were politically loyal to Sōjiji. By the time the rotating abbot system was abolished by governmental edict in 1871, Sōjiji had seen 49,766 abbots in five and a half centuries (Nodomi 2007: 7). Sōjiji's branch temples outnumbered Eiheiji's by nearly a ten-to-one margin.

The modern *zuise haitō* ceremony was established as a result of the Meiji Era compromises that led to historically-significant Eiheiji and the politically-powerful Sōjiji coming to their uneasy truce over the leadership of the modern Sōtō Zen sect. Today, the *zuise* ceremony serves as a ritual confirmation of the priest's ordination – a victory lap, if you will. Priests are now required to officiate a single ceremony at both Sōjiji and Eiheiji. Often, priests will do this back to back, performing the ceremony at Eiheiji one day, and then boarding a train bound for Yokohama to perform the ceremony again at Sōjiji the following morning.

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[3] The *zuise* ceremony (historically distinct from the rotating abbot system) actually began at Eiheiji, where the title of "former abbot" was exchanged for monetary and material donations (Bodiford 1993: 74). However, unlike Sōjiji, the "former abbot" title was decidedly honorary; while priests could use the title of "former abbot of Eiheiji" among their official credentials, they were not included in the official record of the abbacy.

The *zuise* ceremony at Sōjiji is actually a very simple process. Anywhere from one to five newly-minted priests emerge into the hall after morning services wearing bright red *kesa*, with similarly colored bowing mats and slippers. This bright red color is an echo of Daruma's red cloak, often featured in visual representations of the famous patriarch as he ventured over mountain and desert to bring Buddhism from India to China. This red color is particular to Sōjiji; at the *zuise* at Eiheiji, they will wear a more humble brown. The priests are responsible for officiating – that is, offering incense and prostrations – during a special fifteen-minute *zuise fūgin* which takes place after the morning services. After the ceremony, congratulations are offered and commemorative pictures are taken.

After the date of *zuise* has been registered and confirmed with the Sōtō Zen administrative office, the priest gains the title of *oshō*, the official distinction of a fully ordained priest. At this point, they are fully vested clergy, eligible to perform all of the ritual and administrative responsibilities of an abbot of a parish temple. More importantly, they gain the right to "reproduce" new members of the Sōtō Zen line by having disciples and Dharma descendants of their own.

Old Masters

When all is said and done, a newly minted Sōtō priest has emerged, butterfly-like, into his new identity as a professional clergyman. In addition to having to immediately find ways of making ends meet, the new priests must quickly learn to negotiate their new social roles, identities, and obligations.

In the Sōtō Zen sect, the title *rōshi* – literally translated as "elderly teacher" – is used as a generic title of respect for fully-ordained clergy, in the sense that "Reverend" is used in English. In common usage, it is often tacked on to the titles of other currently-held offices: for example, the priest who holds the office of Tenzo will be known as "Tenzo-rōshi". Like the honorific "*-san*" or "*-sensei*", *rōshi* is never used in reference to oneself. Rather, it is a term of respect used by clerical subordinates and lay men and women to superiors.[4] As with other honorific titles in Japanese, superiors will almost never refer to their subordinates as *rōshi*, substituting more informal labels (*-san, -kun*).

While, in the Sōtō Zen sect, the title *rōshi* has lost much of its age-related connotation, newly-minted priests sometimes experience a sense of dissonance when they begin hearing themselves being referred to as *rōshi*, a term they have previously reserved for their elders and superiors. One monastic informant was bothered enough by this to insist that people refer to him with the less-common "*-oshō*" – technically correct, but rarely heard. [5] Being called *rōshi*, he said, made him feel uncomfortable, because he felt he was being given respect that he did not yet deserve.

Speaking with several post-training priests, I am told that the first pieces of the monastic lifestyle to be abandoned are usually the dawn-to-dusk daily schedules they kept at the monastery, the daily practice of zazen, and the vegetarian dietary restrictions. The physically-intense daily cleaning is also a thing of the past. At their home temples, cleaning and caretaking is usually a job relegated to women: their mothers, and later, their wives.

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[4] In the Rinzai Zen sects, the usage of *rōshi* and *zenji* is effectively reversed from the way the titles are used in Sōtō Zen. Rinzai priests are referred to as *zenji*, while the term *rōshi* is used only for abbots of training temples.

[5] *Oshō* is often glossed into English as "preceptor". I decline to use this translation as "preceptor" carries the meaning of teacher or instructor, rather than the intended meaning of "one who observes the precepts".

This is not to suggest in the least that the priests are free to "lounge about." Much to the contrary, the daily life of a professional priest is nearly always a busy one, and one's schedule depends greatly upon their home temple and their place within it. Priests at a "well-established" temple – that is, a temple with more than three hundred parishioner families – will find that their daily schedules revolve heavily around ritual observances such as funerals and memorial services, as well as ministering to their parishioners (such as visiting the elderly at home or in hospital).

Three hundred parishioner families is commonly quoted as the "threshold" for viability. Priests who have temples with fewer than this will often be forced by financial necessity to take on a second, full-time job. I have met priests who "doubled" as salarymen, EMTs, teachers, and accountants. Since the Japanese workweek is commonly five or even six days long with many hours of overtime expected, this dual-life often leaves the priest with only the weekends (or even just Sunday) to fulfill his responsibilities to his parishioners.

This leaves almost no time for his family, or for his having any "free" time. First sons are the ones who are by and large most likely to be appointed "assistant abbot" (*fuku-jūshoku*) of his family temple. As soon as their training is completed, they will likely be fast-tracked to full ordination so they can take on greater responsibilities required of them at home. As the abbot ages, he will often retain the title, while the assistant abbot does much or all of the real ritual work. Like an apprentice, the assistant is given a stipend from the temple's income, but for a young priest with a new family, this amount is often insufficient for their needs. Should this be the case, even a priest with a

relatively successful temple will have to find outside work, again often dominating the majority of their time.

Second or third sons are usually less-inclined to (or even actively discouraged from) entering the priesthood. If they choose to follow their fathers and brothers, they will face an uphill climb their entire careers: since the family temple will go to their eldest brother, they cannot be guaranteed future residence or income. Because they are not in line to inherit the family temple, they will rarely find themselves with responsibilities at home, and correspondingly find themselves with less direction and purpose. Often the only recourse for younger sons is to make a name for themselves independent of their fathers and brothers: a common path is to try to find work within the sect (at the local or national sectarian administrative offices), to minister at overseas Sōtō Zen missions, or to try to establish themselves as a public teacher or leader of a zazen group.

For priests that are in line to inherit a large or successful temple, there is less of a fear of "what do I do now?" Sacrifices might be made in the short term, but financial stability can be reasonably expected over the longer term. But for priests who do not have these securities, full ordination can sometimes come with a sudden feeling of anxiety, akin to graduating college without a job prospect. For these priests, continued residence at Sōjiji past ordination is a means by which to bridge the gap between graduation and finding a permanent parish temple of their own.

Zenji-sama

The temple kitchens where Kodama worked are only one of a network of administrative jobs that are required for the smooth day-to-day operation of a large training monastery like Sōjiji. A modern Sōtō Zen training monastery retains all but two of these traditional Song monastic officers, and adds several more. The result is a well-oiled hierarchical machine that allows Sōjiji to serve its purposes as a training temple for priests, as a *bodaiji* for parishioners, and as an administrative hub of the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect.

At the apex of Sōjiji's hierarchical pyramid sits the abbot. The abbot serves as the spiritual head of the temple and as a living paragon of the Sōtō Zen teachings. The position of abbot is largely ceremonial; as with many Japanese hierarchies, the abbacy of the head temples can be said to be a reward for a life lived in service to the Sōtō Zen sect. Sōjiji's abbot shares the nominal leadership of the Sōtō Zen sect with the abbot of Eiheiji on a two-year rotating schedule.

In addition to being the formal "abbot" (*jūshoku*) of Sōjiji, the abbot has two titles that are used simultaneously. The first is *kanshu*, which is used in reference to his being the head administrative officer of a large training facility. The second is *zenji*, translated directly as "Zen master," which is used to characterize his role as the spiritual leader of the temple. In such a way, the dichotomous nature of a large Zen temple like Sōjiji is mediated in the very person of the abbot.

A future abbot of Sōjiji or Eiheiji is chosen by special election, with all officially registered Sōtō Zen clergy eligible to cast votes. Unlike the Roman Catholic papacy, for

example, the abbacy of the two Sōtō-shū head temples is not directly chosen. Rather, the winner of the election is named to the position of assistant abbot (*fuku-kanshu*).

The assistant abbot is nominally subordinate to the abbot, but the two offices are often blurred, placing them on more or less equal footing within the temple hierarchy. Among other functions, the assistant abbot serves as a representative for the temple during important ceremonies and functions at which an abbot's presence is required, but the abbot himself cannot be present. Since the abbot is in residence at Sōjiji, the assistant-abbot will spend the majority of his time away from Tsurumi, regularly traveling back and forth between Sōjiji and his home temple as needed.

The assistant abbot is the heir presumptive to the abbot, assuming the abbacy ceremoniously but without challenge when the current abbot steps down or dies in office. This allows for a smoother transition between abbacies, as the assistant-abbot is elected years before he will actually take office. When the new abbot is installed, an election is held soon after to fill the assistant abbot's vacated position. However, since the priests elected to the offices of abbot and assistant abbot are generally elderly, it is not uncommon for a sitting abbot to outlive his *fuku-kanshu*.

With the exception of the assistant abbot, all subordinate temple officers serve at the invitation of the abbot. The priests he calls to service in his administration will greatly determine both the ideological and practical directions the temple will take over the course of an abbot's tenure. While the new abbots are charged with maintaining the traditional practice of the Sōtō Zen patriarchs, in reality each new abbacal administration is an opportunity to enact major shifts in temple policy and practice.

These shifts will have profound effects not only on the quality and content of the training for hundreds of unsui who will enter Sōjiji during an abbot's reign, but can also dramatically affect the way temple parishioners, practitioners and visitors relate to Sōjiji. In this way, it is possible to speak of different administrative "eras" at a temple, just as one would a governmental or presidential administration. A brief look at the policies enacted by the three most recent abbots demonstrates this fact.

Umeda Shinryū-zenji (1906-2000, r. 1982-1996) is well-remembered by the monks who trained under his administration. One long-time officer at Sōjiji fondly recalls being inspired as an unsui by Umeda-zenji's (then in his late eighties) unbridled energy: "Umeda-zenji loved calligraphy. When the Daisodō wasn't being used for a ceremony, he would turn on all the lights and roll out long pieces of paper on the floor of the hall. He had a big paintbrush, and he would jump around like he was a child, making strokes here and there. I remember thinking, 'What an energetic and healthy *zenji* he is! I hope I'm that lively when I'm that old!'"

Umeda-zenji similarly instilled in his unsui a concern for human rights. Human rights had been charged topic within the Sōtō Zen sect in the wake of a 1984 controversy in which a Sōtō priest publicly revealed decades of institutionalized discrimination towards the Japanese *burakumin* outcastes (Bodiford 1996). It was under Umeda-zenji's abbacy that Sōjiji instated a special classroom for the "Protection and Advancement of Human Rights" (*jinkin yōgo suishin shitsu*), with lectures and twice-monthly small-group seminars in which all training unsui are required to participate.

Still, many of the veteran lay practitioners remembered Umeda-zenji's fourteen-year abbacy as a time when Sōjiji closed off into itself, a conservative reaction to the

popular and international focus of Sōjiji during the "Zen Boom" of the 1960s and 1970s and a response to the rise in pious conspicuous consumption of Japanese parishioners and practitioners made possible by the bubble economy of the 1980s.

Itabashi Kōsō-zenji (1927-, r. 1998-2002) went a long way towards reversing Sōjiji's years of introversion by making an active effort to reinvent Sōjiji as both a leader in environmental conservation and public religious institution which welcomed both Japanese and international visitors. To many in the lay community, his administration is remembered as a "golden age" (*ōgon jidai*) at Sōjiji: in addition to being a prolific author, Itabashi-zenji revitalized Sōjiji's failing Baikakō (chapter 5) as well as regularly sat zazen with the Sunday Sanzenkai. The clergy too remembered him fondly, as Itabashi-zenji would take his meals in the common meal hall with the unsui, and even personally make a nightly review of the temple, turning off lights to conserve energy. Under his administration, he enacted the "Open Sōjiji" policy: the Mukai Karamon gate, traditionally open only during New Years and on visits from the Imperial Household was now opened to the world. In addition, when not in use, the Shūryō was made available to anyone who wished to sit zazen, at any time. Perhaps most significantly, Itabashi-zenji transformed the temple landscape by working with local environmentalist Miyawaki Akira to build the "Sennen no Mori" – the "Forest of a Thousand Years" – a revitalized natural landscape that would serve to attract generations of visitors who would feel at home and at peace at Sōjiji.

However, there were many who felt that his populist approach to reinventing Sōtō Zen was going too far. According to whispers I heard during fieldwork, intrasectarian politics eventually pushed Itabashi-zenji out of the abbacy after only four years. His

successor, Ōmichi Kōsen (1917-2011, r. 2002-2011), became the 24th abbot of the new line in 2002.

Ōmichi-zenji has held many offices at Sōjiji over his long life. He was in his early nineties when I did my field research, and had lost many of his physical faculties. His frailty was all the more apparent in that he was wheelchair bound in a temple that was not built to be handicapped accessible. Ramps were added to the Daisodō to make it wheelchair accessible, but to get from the abbacal residence to the Butsuden, he needed to be transported by a special car and then lifted in his wheelchair by several monks up the stairs and over the threshold.

Both the clergy and the lay community spoke publicly of Ōmichi-zenji with reverence and respect. Still, it was at times difficult for the lay community to reconcile this eminent monk who had devoted his life's works to the Sōtō Zen sect with the frail old man that they saw before them. During benedictions, he required the assistance of a reader to read the text into his ear, and his speech was often difficult to understand. At first, I thought that my difficulty in understanding him was due to limitations of my Japanese ability, but I was reassured on several occasions when I looked to my informants for help with what was being said, and they simply shrugged.

To many, Ōmichi-zenji's abbacy was a sharp about-face from Itabashi-zenji's tenure, focusing more on ensuring Sōjiji's continued survival in the long term through religious conservatism. As we will see in the next chapter, many of the laity who had been attracted by Itabashi-zenji's populist style felt alienated by Sōjiji's return to policies which they felt reaffirmed, rather than broke down, the traditional barriers between priest and layman. Nevertheless, Ōmichi-zenji's presence at large ceremonies like the Ōbon

Sejiki guaranteed a large public turnout from parishioners. It was likely that these parishioners were swayed less by the aged man's charisma than they were by the fact that it was the Zenji himself officiating, thus giving the ceremony added significance and weight.

In addition to the zenji's abbacal duties at Sōjiji, he also shares the nominal leadership of the Sōtō Zen sect with Eiheiji's abbot. Each zenji serves as the "head" of the sect for two years, with the office alternating back and forth between the temples. Despite these lofty responsibilities, the zenji, according to one priest, is essentially a politician: aside from ceremonial responsibilities, the abbot's job is to be the public face of Sōjiji and Sōtō Zen by meeting with influential public figures and donors, as well as standing as a model for a life spent in service to the Buddhist path. All of the administrative concerns of the temple are delegated to members of his administration.

Dividing Labor

At the most general level, Sōjiji – following the tradition of the Song-style Chinese monasteries – is divided along an invisible east/west axis which serves to divide the labor that takes place within the temple's walls. While both halves of Sōjiji are, of course, one entity, the activities and labor that takes place on either side of this imaginary division are so different as to appear to be separate entities entirely.

The Western Division (*seibu*) is the educational half of the temple, overseeing the training of new monks and the coordination of the ritual and ceremonial life of the temple community. In a training temple like Sōjiji, the Western Division can be best described as

a seminary: it is in the *seibu* that the novice monks will learn the ritual protocol and doctrine that they will use in their future lives as clergy. Nominally under the guidance of a principal known as the Seidō, the daily training of the unsui falls to three priests and their coterie of assistants. These priests, known collectively as the *seibu yakusan* (officers of the *seibu*) are the Godō, Tantō, and Ino.

Like many roles in the temple, the Seidō is largely a ceremonial role, seldom requiring the priest holding the office to be on campus. The actual daily life and education of the unsui is managed by the Godō, the Tantō and the Ino. While the positions of Godō and Tantō have long existed in the traditional Chinese format, their present portfolios are a relatively recent innovation, dating from the sectarian reforms of the Meiji period. These two offices were developed to diffuse the heavy burden placed upon the *Ino* who, as cantor, was not only responsible for the liturgical order and keeping of ritual time during ceremonies, but whose purview also included maintaining the daily schedule of the entire temple, serving as de facto "principal" of the unsui-in-training, keeping discipline in the Monk's Hall and ensuring that the temple rules are enforced and proper protocol observed at all times. Below these three teachers are the assistant monks who are tasked with keeping discipline among the unusi.

In contrast, the Eastern Division (*tōbu*) houses the administrative and operational offices which govern the daily operations of the temple. If the abbot is the CEO of the temple, then the COO is the priest known as the Kannin. The Kannin is technically third in the hierarchy behind the abbot and assistant abbot, but to his office falls the responsibility of keeping the temple administratively and financially sound both in the present and towards the future. Given the intensity of the work involved, as well as the

intimacy with temple operations that comes with the job, the Kannin are often rewarded by being nominated for the assistant abbacy upon its vacancy.

Below the Kannin are eight sections between which are split the various aspects of temple administration: Rokuji (Planning and General Affairs), Fūsu (Comptroller), Tenzo (Kitchens), Shissui (Maintenance and Labor), Fukyō (Propagation and Public Outreach), and Jishin (Ceremony). The priest in charge of each department takes the title of that department.

While the majority of the novice unsui in the temple are assigned to the general assembly of the Kandoku-ryō, more experienced unsui (or younger unsui with specialized needs) and recently-ordained priests are often assigned to staff a specific administrative department for a period of three months. In each of these departments, responsibilities run from the secretarial (answering phones, receiving guests, and serving tea) to the managerial. In some cases, departments which have famous or otherwise absent heads, are often run on a daily basis by the most senior of these younger priests.

The officers who will comprise the temple administration of an abbot's tenure are formally "summoned" to service by the Zenji, a tradition which masks the fact that their names were chosen for the position by the Kannin and his administrators. If the position is accepted, the priests are expected to serve a term of three years, which are renewable on a case-by-case basis yearly for up to a total of five years. The priests are monetarily compensated for their work, and receive private rooms at Sōjiji during their tenure.

For a younger priest, especially those who are not in line to inherit a temple (for example, second sons and priests who were not born into a clerical family), staying on at Sōjiji after ordination is an important means of establishing a name for oneself within the

temple and sectarian hierarchy. While a priest with the proper educational pedigree can "graduate" from Sōjiji after six months to a year, many unsui express no rush to start the responsibilities of working at their home temple. Especially for those whose fathers (and even grandfathers) may still be in their working prime, staying on for additional time at Sōjiji is a way of alleviating the financial burden from the clerical family while better preparing the monk for their own parish.

For an elderly priest, returning for service at Sōjiji can be a comfortable gig – if the priest wants it in the first place. In reality, there is often considerable difficulty in staffing the upper echelons of the temple hierarchy. This is not due to a lack of qualified candidates, but rather to a lack of willing candidates: the time and dedication required to adequately do one's job as an officer at a large training temple like Sōjiji conflict greatly with the responsibilities required of caring for one's home temple. At the same time, many of these priests are either close to or at retirement age, leading many to turn down positions that would jeopardize their retirement. These older priests often delegate much of their work to their immediate subordinates, younger priests who can be relied on to oversee much of the day-to-day tasks.

The most competitive positions are the "middle management" roles, the immediate assistants to the department heads. As is typical in Japanese corporate structure, these assistants are the one who are inevitably saddled with the most responsibility. These positions go most often to middle-career priests – those who often already have significant responsibilities as assistant abbots at their home temples, but who are most often married with children. The additional income from working at a honzan is the major reason why these positions are so competitive, often saving these

priests from having to find second jobs outside of the sect to supplement their wages. Still the pressure and need to sacrifice time with one's family and responsibilities is often a difficult price to pay. While the burden is somewhat lessened the closer one lives to Yokohama, for those whose home temples sit on other coasts or other islands, the result is long periods away from home (often months at a time), and a need to commute between Sōjiji and their home temples to fulfill professional and familial responsibilities, requiring long car, train or even plane trips.

These priests arrive and leave at the beginning of their tenure as the novice unsui do, in full traveling regalia, as if they were "ascending the mountain" for the first time. However, the older priests have few if any of the oppressive restrictions on diet or movement that the unsui do. For these priests, *shugyō* is in the pressure to perform their responsibilities to the best of their abilities: as they move up the temple hierarchy, they will have more and more people who depend on their decisions and effort. At the same time, they are now expected to keep up appearances: their subordinates and the visiting public will be watching their every move.

Kitchen Work

As the unsui are just beginning to wake up in the Sōdō, elsewhere in the temple the monks assigned to the kitchens have already been awake for over an hour and a half. The temple kitchen, known as the Tenzo-ryō, is located in the basement of the Hakujikan, a multi-story building which also houses Sōjiji's administrative offices.

The kitchen prepares food for the monastic community and the temple employees. Over six hundred servings of food are prepared each day: three meals for two hundred people. Cooking and serving a day's worth of hot meals are important and time consuming tasks. While the kitchen monks are freed from the obligation of participating in zazen and morning ceremonies, theirs is hardly leisure time. From about two-thirty in the morning until about five in the evening, the kitchens are alive with virtually constant activity.

The kitchens are thoroughly modern in appearance, resembling the large, bright industrial kitchens of a university or hospital cafeteria. The walls are a sterile white, and dominated by large stainless steel fixtures like stoves, vats, shelves, and preparation space. Along two walls are large steel vats where huge batches of white rice are prepared – as gruel in the mornings, and as rice to accompany lunch and dinner. Other vats contain two hundred servings of soup, or whatever else is on the menu for the day. Several pairs of stainless steel islands are placed throughout the kitchen for chopping vegetables and food preparation. Two walk-in refrigerators dominate another wall.

On the wall, a closed circuit television shows a live video feed from the Daisodō. As soon as morning services are done, the *tenzo* monks must have breakfast prepared and loaded onto serving trays to be brought to the dining hall upstairs. Indeed, the job of the *tenzo* monks does not end when the food is prepared: in the dining hall, the monks of the kitchens become servers who ladle out food to the community. After the meal is finished, they are the cleanup crew who wipe the tables clean and collect the used bowls, chopsticks and serving utensils, and then the dishwashers who clean all of the bowls, cooking instruments, and kitchen area by hand.

By the time they are finished with all of these chores, it is nearly seven in the morning. Serving others before yourself is a virtue, and it is only when their morning work is finished that they are able to break their own fasts. If everything goes as scheduled, they will have enough down time for a break or even a quick nap before the whole process begins again at eight for lunch.

Work in the kitchens is demanding, and it was an assignment that Kodama specifically requested. Kodama took his responsibilities in the kitchen very seriously, knowing that he must serve as a teacher and an exemplar to the younger unsui who were assigned to work beneath him. He certainly had his work cut out for him: in addition to having to plan menus for three meals a day, the kitchens are almost always critically understaffed. By Kodama's own estimation, it takes about thirty monks to efficiently run the kitchens. However, Sōjiji was understaffed as it was, and the kitchens were only requisitioned twenty bodies. It was Kodama's challenge to inspire the unsui to push their *shugyō* to the next level.

Kodama saw his appointment as a great opportunity to demonstrate to the younger unsui lessons like those he imagined that the Chinese temple cook in Dōgen's story might have taught to his charges. On the whiteboard in the kitchen's small office, Kodama would draw cartoon bears in monastic robes which conveyed through word bubbles lessons of mindfulness or gratitude for the donated food that the monks were preparing and eating.

Often, Kodama would challenge his subordinates to think in creative ways. On one of the days I volunteered in the kitchen, Kodama gave a bored unsui a "Zen puzzle" (he said this in English). Taking a square block of fried tofu, Kodama cut it into four

triangles. He then told the unsui to make a shape using three of the four triangles to be served on small dishes. The unsui played around with the pieces, making various two dimensional trapezoids and parallelograms that barely fit on the plates. Finally, he came up with an answer that fit the serving dishes: a three dimensional pyramid. Kodama praised the unsui for his solution, and clapped the younger man on the shoulder.

Other times, Kodama would skillfully transform reprimands into teachable moments. One particularly poignant lesson occurred when Kodama stopped an unsui who had been throwing away too much of the head of cabbage that he had been cutting. Kodama challenged him to consider the moment that something is transformed from "food" to "garbage." When the unsui responded to his question with silence, Kodama explained that there is no objective moment in time when this happens. Rather, the transition happens only in your own head, at the moment when you mentally determine something is "useless" and act upon throwing it away. Kodama took a strip of stray cabbage from the counter and narrated its slow trajectory into a garbage can: "food, food, food, food, food, garbage." If you are less quick to label something as garbage, Kodama explained to the unsui, you will find that you have a lot less to throw away.

Kodama told me that he tried his best to be a good and fair *senpai* to his subordinates (*kōhai*). The dichotomous *senpai-kōhai* system is a staple of Japanese socialization, found in nearly every aspect of social life. When it works best, it establishes a life-long relationship between superordinate and subordinate. Ideally, the *senpai-kōhai* relationship forms a chain between past and future: the former were once subordinates themselves, while the latter will one day be *senpai* to their own subordinates. At the same time, the system lends itself easily to the possibility of exploitation: stories of

physically and mentally abusive *senpai* are widespread, but so are stories of the dangers of insubordinate and disrespectful *kōhai*.

Kodama was often frustrated by his charges, who viewed their jobs in the kitchen as a three-month long punishment to be endured, rather than an opportunity to bring deeper personal meaning to their *shugyō*. Kodama lamented that the unsui saw the Tenzo-ryō "as a part-time job, as if they were flipping hamburgers." When he spoke to them, he was fairly certain that they were tuning him out as white noise.

In his own experience, Kodama had dealt with several mean and abusive *senpai*, and – like every one of the older priests I spoke with – he was determined not to perpetuate a cycle of violence. At the same time, he acknowledged that fear of violent discipline (or lack thereof) did have an effect on the way the unsui comported themselves. Without it, the unsui were "*otokoppoi*" – "manly" – by which Kodama meant arrogant and prideful, swaggering around the temple "like Marlon Brando in *Rebel Without a Cause*." "Pride (*puraido*)," he said with frustration, "has no place in a Zen temple."

Not long after this conversation, Kodama requested a transfer to a different temple department when his current term was up. He told me that he felt that he had learned all he could in the Tenzo-ryō and was looking forward to a new opportunity to deepen his *shugyō*. I suspected that the daily frustration with exhausted and apathetic unsui had finally taken its toll on this humble temple cook.

The Godfather and the "Delinquent Monk"

On a warm April evening, I met up with Yanagi, a temple priest from a prefecture near Tokyo, at a small bar near Tsurumi Station. With food and beer both cheap and only a button-press away, I had found this particular bar to be a good place to spend a couple of hours in conversation. While it can get quite busy, especially on weekends, the walls of the booths are high enough to create feeling of privacy and seclusion, and thick enough to block most of the ambient noise of the room.

Kodama had introduced me to Yanagi one afternoon while the latter was visiting his friend at Sōjiji. The two men were "classmates" (*dōangōsha*) at Sōjiji, having entered into *shugyō* in the same year. While they were at Sōjiji, they were twice assigned to the same temple departments, and consequently spent a lot of time getting to know each other. Unlike Kodama, who stayed behind at Sōjiji to get more experience, Yanagi left Sōjiji after a year to return to his home temple.

On paper, these two men had the same training and qualifications, and in fact came from very similar family backgrounds. In actual fact, as I was to discover, their personalities were mirror images of each other: in Yanagi, Kodama's dedication to the ideals and techniques of the Buddhist path was met by a spirit of cynicism and rebellion.

Yanagi arrived wearing a worn blue *samue*, the loose-fitting work clothes worn by the monks when they perform manual labor. He was wearing old white sneakers, and a small white towel, tied in the back, covered his shaven head. He is carried a shopping bag from a local department store, and over his shoulder was a cloth messenger bag, similar to the one I was carrying.

Nothing about the clothes he wore or the way he carried himself necessarily advertised "Zen monk." The only thing that had the potential to give away his status was the *samue*, which is often worn as "street clothes" by Buddhist clergy of all sects. Unlike the formal robes and *kesa*, however, a *samue* can be purchased and worn by anyone; I myself own a set, and can attest to the fact that they are terribly comfortable. Were it not for my own reluctance to get them dirty, I could see myself wearing them casually, as Yanagi was doing here.

We were seated by the hostess, and soon our waiter came by to take our drink order. I ordered a tall draft beer; Yanagi asked only for a glass of water. I don't normally drink alone, and I began to wonder what kind of message it would send that I was so quick to drink when social circumstances may not have warranted it. I was out with a Buddhist monk, after all.

I needn't have worried. No sooner than our waiter dropped off our drinks and left, Yanagi looked around the corner and, seeing that the coast was clear, reached into an inner pocket to pull out a hip flask full of liquor. He poured several quaffs of the alcohol into his water and mixed the drink with his finger, holding out the flask to me. I politely refused, but my face must have betrayed my surprise. "Alcohol gets expensive, you know?" he shrugged with a smile. "This way is cheaper." He deftly slipped the flask back into his pocket, raised his glass and took a deep sip.

An hour and several rounds later, the conversation turned to movies. Yanagi had always loved American movies, he says, and recently he saw *The Godfather, Part III*, which he thought was quite good.

"What?! The third one is terrible!," I exclaimed, exaggerating my reaction. "The acting is bad and there isn't any story."

"Well, I liked it. I really relate to the characters," he replied.

I hadn't seen the movie in quite some time, but I asked him to explain, excited about hearing which of the movie's characters he identified with. Was he going to say Michael Corleone and make a comparison that Buddhist life was like the Mafia, where one tries to get out, "but they keep pulling you back in"? Maybe he identified with Michael's son Anthony, who was willing to risk his powerful father's wrath to follow his own dreams of a life in opera?

"Well, there was the story about the bad priest, you know?," he asked me. I had forgotten that. He was referring to the character of Archbishop Gilday, the sinister Vatican priest who plotted to embezzle millions from the Corleone family and who was instrumental in the fictional conspiracy that ended in the murder of the Pope.

Yanagi described feeling striking parallels between the movie's portrayal of greed and other ethical "compromises" in the Vatican with his own experiences as a clergyman in an institutionalized religion. It was easy for him to see the progression from a priest humbly receiving a pious donation from a layperson to that same priest extorting a sizable bribe from a rich donor willing to spend money to redeem the worldly sins that earned the money in the first place. Religious institutions like temples and churches are dependent on donations, but instead of helping all people equally, much time and energy is spent – "wasted," according to Yanagi – courting and catering to the wishes of wealthy benefactors.

"If you have money, you can get anything you want from a priest: a prestigious posthumous name, a big grave for your family, even your own private temple! We're happy to accept donations from anyone: politicians, businessmen, and criminals. It doesn't matter. We don't ask where the money came from. Even if the money came from crime, we tell the person that they're doing a good deed. If they give enough money, we'll inscribe their names on the temple. In a hundred years, people will remember them as a great friend of Buddhism, instead of a criminal." Watching the Vatican bestow a papal honor on Michael Corleone in exchange for a quarter of a billion dollars made Yanagi realize that, despite superficial differences, Sōtō Zen is no different from any other institutionalized religion.

"I hate the word 'religion.' I want to throw it away," he announced to me. The problem with "religion", he explained, is that it is used too often as an excuse for people to do bad things to each other. Not only that, "religion" glosses over the fact that it is something performed by human beings. Despite years of training and dedication, priests, like their lay benefactors, are ultimately all too human: even the most well-intentioned or well-disciplined is fallible, corruptible, and changeable.

Yanagi explained that the Archbishop in the movie probably didn't start off intending to be bad. His descent into malfeasance likely started with an ethical compromise or a bad choice. Eventually, the poor moral choices became habitual until the priest had strayed absolutely from his path, nothing more than a charlatan in clerical robes. "As I watched the movie, I wondered what he thought about himself. I thought that it must have made him feel very guilty."

Yanagi looked past me, staring at the wall. "I thought that I was a lot like him." I asked him what he's done that makes that would make him feel guilty. He shrugged and says that he doesn't want to talk about it. At that moment, I realized that I had hit a stone wall. We ordered another round of drinks and change topics.

Over the next few months, I spent more time with Yanagi. Soon after the night out at the bar, he started referring to himself as a "delinquent monk" (*furyō bōzu*), often going so far as to sign his e-mails that way. The more I got to know him, the more he opened up about his "vices." He drinks. He has eaten meat all of his life. He tells me that he smoked while he was at Sōjiji, but his wife made him quit.

Rules to Live By

The list of Buddhist precepts and prohibitions codified in the Vinaya (Rules for Monastic Conduct) is traditionally held to number over two hundred prescriptions for men and over three hundred for women. As the Buddhism community grew in China, a separate list of between five and eight "Bodhisattva precepts" was developed to be administered to lay adherents. By the late Tang period, Chinese Buddhist monastics continued to receive the traditional list Vinaya precepts, in addition to this new list of Bodhisattva precepts.

When Buddhism arrived in Japan from the Chinese mainland in the Eighth Century CE, the first Japanese monastics continued in this tradition of receiving both the Vinaya precepts and the Bodhisattva precepts. Not long after, a Japanese reformer named Saichō (767-822), known as the founder of the Japanese Tendai Buddhist sect, argued

that the 250-article Vinaya precepts were no longer relevant to Japanese monastics. To his disciples, Saichō transmitted only the Bodhisattva precepts, as well as a list of forty-eight "minor" precepts. This tradition continued into the medieval period where Dōgen, originally ordained as a Tendai priest at Mt. Hiei, would have received them in this manner.

During Dōgen's journey to China, he faced difficulty securing permission to train at official Ch'an monasteries: having not received the Vinaya precepts, he could not be recognized as a Buddhist monastic (Okumura 2004: 1). No records indicate that Dōgen ever took the Vinaya precepts in order to practice in China. Scholars believe that Dōgen's Chinese master, Tendō Nyōdō, likely accepted Dōgen's limited Bodhisattva precepts.

When Dōgen returned to Japan and began promoting his nascent Sōtō Zen sect, he ordained new Sōtō Zen monastics using a new list of sixteen precepts, as opposed to the fifty-eight that he received during his own Tendai ordination. Dōgen's list includes the three Refuges (in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha), the three Pure precepts, and the ten Major Prohibitions:

1) Do not kill	不殺生戒
2) Do not steal	不偸盗戒
3) Do not engage in improper sexual conduct	不貪婬戒
4) Do not lie	不妄語戒
5) Do not deal in intoxicants	不酒戒
6) Do not criticize others	不説過戒
7) Do not praise oneself and slander others	不自讃毀他戒
8) Do not be stingy with the Dharma or property	不慳法財戒
9) Do not give way to anger	不瞋恚戒
10) Do not slander the Three Treasures	不謗三宝戒

(source and translation: Sōtō Shūmūchō)

For over seven centuries, these precepts have transferred from master to disciple, bestowed upon clerics and laypersons alike during special ceremonies known as *Jukai*-e, as well as becoming fixtures of the Sōtō Zen funeral liturgy.

Of crucial importance to the establishment of a clerical identity as distinguished from the laity were the first, third and fifth precepts: following a strict interpretation of the prohibitions, Buddhist clerics were specifically prohibited from eating meat, from sex and marriage, and from consuming alcohol. By the Tokugawa period, these religious precepts became codified into the law of the state: a Buddhist cleric found in violation of these three precepts could incur punishments ranging from defrocking to public shaming to execution (Jaffe 2001: 21-22).

During the period of Imperial restoration in the years after 1868, the new government of the nascent Japanese polity realized that the Buddhist institution, which had been an instrument of social control by the Tokugawa military government for more than two hundred years, presented a danger to the new political hegemony. In an attempt to limit the numbers and authority of the Buddhist clergy in the new political field, the Meiji hegemons passed a series of ordinances that became known as the *Nikujiki Saitai* ("eat meat and marry") laws: following 1872, the Japanese Buddhist clergy was permitted – and in some cases mandated – to eat meat, drink alcohol, and have sexual relations (Jaffe 2001: 95). In theory, this was supposed to amount to a legal "defrocking" of the Buddhist community, a repeal of clerical privileges which would deny the clergy their previous tax-free status, diminish their authority in the eyes of the populace and limit their ability to mount a strong ideological resistance against the nascent government. In practice, however, these changes led primarily to a dramatic shift in the way that the Buddhist clergy negotiated their clerical identities in the modern period.

Most crucial was a change in the force of the precepts themselves: what had previously been "grave prohibitions" became merely suggestions, lacking the ethical and

punitive force they once carried. Interestingly, this reinterpretation of the precepts coincided with the rise in popularity of Japanese Buddhism's traditional religious antagonist, missionary Christianity. Corresponding to the rise of Christian missionary and charitable activities in Japan in the late-Meiji and early-Taishō periods, the ten Buddhist precepts (*jūkai*) were publicly presented in counterpoint to the Judeo-Christian Ten Commandments (also known as the *Jūkai*). Whereas the Ten Commandments proclaimed "thou shalt not" (*-suru na*), the Buddhist clergy claimed that the ten Buddhist precepts carried the message of "thou shalt try not to" (*-shinakute miyō*), proof that Buddhism was a more loving and forgiving religion than Christianity claimed to be.

In many ways, this reinterpretation of the precepts from religious mandate to a lifestyle suggestion was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it rendered the new legal "freedoms" of the clergy intelligible to both the clergy and the laity while preserving the image of maintaining Buddhist tradition. It also virtually dissolved the traditional material barriers between the clergy and the laity, leaving the Buddhist clergy to come to terms with what "maintaining the precepts" actually means in contemporary Japan. For many in the clergy, this leads to a deeply-personal crisis of identity that they are often forced to face alone.

Further complicating the situation is the fact that translations of the precepts from classical Chinese into modern Japanese (and from Japanese into other languages like English) cannot be taken at face value, as they are not literal translations. Rather they are mediated interpretations that must account for centuries of profound shifts in the cultural, political, and religious spheres of Japan and East Asia generally. A case in point is the third precept, the literal meaning of which is "do not indulge in licentiousness." It is easy

to imagine how such meaning might have shifted through translation, localization, and interpretation, morphing from a blanket monastic prohibition against "sexual relations" into one that prohibits "licentiousness" or "sexual lust", and finally into a prohibition against "improper sexual relations." The same semiotic "fuzziness" applies to all of the precepts.

As several of my monastic informants were quick to mention, the precept "do not kill" technically says nothing about meat-eating. The ancient Indian mendicants were beholden to eat anything that was put into their begging bowls, be it meat, grain or vegetable. Indeed, the Buddha himself is said to have died from eating spoiled (or, alternatively, poisoned) meat. Since the prohibition against Buddhist clergy eating meat was a later Chinese development – and therefore not technically an original teaching of the Buddha – it was up to an individual to decide what food they wanted to eat.

Likewise, the prohibition against "intoxicants" – its original reading specifies only alcohol – is often reinterpreted to stress "to excess," under the logic that any activity done to an extreme is "intoxicating" by virtue of it distracting a person from their obligations. Therefore, a priest can drink alcohol – even to the point of drunkenness – as long as one does not drink "to excess". What, exactly, "to excess" means is again left to the interpretation of the individual clergyman. In some cases, this leads to tragedy, as in the famous case of Maezumi Taizan, an alumnus of Sōjiji and founder of the Los Angeles Zen Center, whose long battle with alcoholism (including time spent at the Betty Ford Clinic) culminated in his death by drowning in a bathtub after a night of heavy drinking.

From my interviews, the Japanese laypeople who visit Sōjiji are seemingly comfortable with the idea of the Buddhist clergy drinking alcohol and eating meat, and

realize that it is the exceptional priest who does *not* partake of these things. Interestingly, it is American and European Zen enthusiasts who most often express a sense of disenchantment and even anger when they see a Japanese clergyman eating meat or drinking alcohol. At one foreigner-led zazen group I sat in on in Tokyo, the post-zazen discussion turned towards the "hypocrisy" of the Japanese Zen clergy who the non-Japanese members of the group perceived as perpetually ignoring or violating their precepts.

By the modern interpretation of the Bodhisattva precepts used by Sōtō Zen, the meat-eating, alcohol-drinking, and family-having Yanagi had done nothing that would characterize him as "delinquent" or in violation of his clerical vows. Still, many priests that I met during my fieldwork, especially those in leadership and teaching roles at Sōjiji and in the Sōtō Zen sect, were conscious of and reflexive on the potential for such behavior to be seen as contradictory and even hypocritical by the laity. Even when alcohol was served at temple functions, funerals, or end-of-year celebrations, I rarely saw a ranking priest eating meat or imbibing alcohol while publicly performing their roles as clergy. It was only afterwards, either in private parties or among other members of the clergy that I saw priests eating and drinking with less inhibition.

The priests I spoke with who kept to vegetarianism or avoided alcohol usually had a ready explanation as to why they did so, often citing the health benefits of a meat-free diet or a dislike for the effects of alcohol. Not a single one I spoke with said that they refrained because of their clerical vows, or because it was something they were "supposed to do." If eating meat and drinking alcohol were Yanagi's vices, he was not alone among the clergy, nor did he show signs of guilt or repentance.

"A Bondage Has Been Born"

It was only towards the end of my fieldwork, after months of spending time with Yanagi that he finally told me what had been weighing so heavily on his conscience. The conversation started out with a phone call. I had met up with Yanagi one evening while he was in Tokyo, and in the middle of dinner he innocuously explained that he had to call his wife. I was checking my e-mail when he suddenly handed me his cellphone: "Would you explain to my wife that I'm out with you, and not another woman?" I thought he was joking. I took the phone from him, and using my politest Japanese, explained that I was the one having dinner with her husband, and I apologized for keeping him away from home. She was extremely pleasant, and I handed the phone back to Yanagi. I thought that maybe she wanted to introduce herself to the person who her husband had spent so much time with these past few months.

He closed his phone and put it back into his bag. "Do you know why Japanese women wear hats during their wedding ceremony?," Yanagi asked me. "To hide their horns." There was a sadness in his smile.

He proceeded to explain to me why he was content to spend so much time away from home. He was in a miserable marriage, and his wife's bursts of anger were regular and fearsome. "She yells at me for coming home late. She yells at me that I don't make enough money. She yells at me that we don't live close enough to a train station. I'm happier when I'm not at home," he admitted to me.

I asked him how long they had dated before he proposed to her. "Three or four times," he told me. He and his wife were an arranged marriage: she was the daughter of a

close friend of his father's, and when they met those few times, she "seemed like she would make a good wife." They were married in a Buddhist wedding ceremony soon after, about two years before I met him. Hearing him tell the story, it sounded like they had been the worst two years of his life.

Arranged marriages like Yanagi's are relatively commonplace within the community of Buddhist clergy in Japan. A priest's father is often the one to introduce his son to a potential wife, who will frequently be the daughter of another clergyman or of a parishioner. Such marriages, once arranged, happen quickly, too soon for either party to really get to know their future spouse. Frequently they are marriages of mutual benefit: if a family has two sons, as in Yanagi's case, the second son will often be married into a clerical family that has a marriageable daughter, but no son. In this arrangement, the eldest son will inherit his natal family's temple, and the second son will become heir to his father-in-law's temple. Having found suitable successors to continue the clerical line, the parishioners – interested in the continuity of custodians to care for their ancestors – will permit the father/father-in-law (and their wives) to remain in their temple homes with income for the rest of their lives. Their children gain spouses who, it is hoped, will dutifully perform their roles as priest-husband-father, and caretaker-wife-mother. While this follows many of the traditional strategies that the Japanese have employed to guarantee continuity of the household line, it bears mentioning that such strategies are a relatively new innovation for the Sōtō Zen clergy – at most four or five generations, at this point.

I asked Yanagi if it were possible to get a divorce. While it was legally possible, he told me, the stakes for a clerical divorce were so high as to be almost unfathomable.

"I'm a priest. How would it look to the parishioners if priests get divorced?," he asked rhetorically. "We're responsible for caring for their families, but if priests get divorced, all it shows is that we can't even take care of our own families!" Making matters difficult was that the temple is not yet "his" – as assistant abbot, it still belonged to his father-in-law. A divorce from his wife would likely cost Yanagi a chance at ever having a temple of his own.

Treading carefully, I asked him why his wife thinks that that he's out with another woman. "I've been with a lot of women. My wife asked me about it once, and I told her. *That* was a mistake!" He took a sip of his beer. "There's a saying in Japanese: 'the heart of a woman and the autumn sky are the same' (*onna no gokoro to aki no sora wa onaji.*). They both make you feel good."

With neither pride nor shame, Yanagi said that he's a man with a sex drive. He had resigned himself that there is nothing – no practice, no precept – that can stop that. He thinks about it and he dreams about it. It only gets worse when he drinks.

There was something more. "I'm in love with another woman," he told me. A mutual friend introduced them at a party, and they hit it off immediately. As Yanagi described her, this woman sounded like everything that his wife is not: understanding, nurturing, and even-tempered. He told me that his wife suspects that there is someone else, if she didn't know outright. "Every night, it's 'where were you? Who were you with?'"

Of all of his clerical vows, the vow to not have "improper sexual relations" was the one that gives him the most concern. "I'm allowed to have sex with my wife, who I

don't love. I'm not allowed to have sex with my girlfriend, who I do love. That's backwards, don't you think?"

Complicating matters further is the fact that his wife had just given birth to a child. I am shocked that he hadn't told me earlier. I asked him the baby's name. He didn't want to tell me. I asked him if the baby is a boy or a girl. He didn't want to tell me. "I don't want to get attached to the baby. The baby is adorable. But my wife has already threatened to take it away and never let me see it." I asked him if he thinks she is serious about this threat. "Probably," he responded.

"Even if my wife leaves me, everyone will say it's my fault. They'll say I abandoned my wife and child. My wife will probably not get remarried, because in Japan women only get 'one strike'. The child will get bullied for not having a father. I think about all of these things, and all I can think of is escaping.

"Do you know what I don't understand? Why can the Buddha be a bad father and not me?"

According to the account of the Buddha's life from the Pali Canon, this is true. The Buddha was, to use the modern term, a "deadbeat dad." When his royal wife gave birth to a son, a not-yet-enlightened Shakyamuni proclaimed that "a bondage has been born." After glimpsing life outside the protective shelter of his palace walls, the future Buddha fled his home and his family, abandoning his wife and child to pursue the transient life of a renunciant (Faure 1998: 16). "Even the Buddha knew that babies and monks are like oil and water," Yanagi said. "They can't mix."

Yanagi missed the freedom he had before he was married – an ironic thing for a priest to say – and believed that the custom of arranged marriage really failed in his case.

He admitted that he really has no one to talk to about his problem, and had been suffering in silence for more than a year. He didn't feel that he could tell his father or older brother, and he was afraid of confiding in his friends for fear that gossip will come back to haunt him and his career.

I slowly came to realize the force of what Yanagi, the self-proclaimed "delinquent monk," was telling me. Contemporary Sōtō Zen clergy are trained to be living embodiments of the Buddha's enlightenment, but are ultimately left to their own devices to struggle with the fact that they are held – by the critical gaze of their fellow priests, their families, the laity, and their own training – to internalize a higher ethical standard than the Buddha himself. In many ways, to hold the contemporary clergy up to the model of their illustrious forebears is to set them up for failure. The Buddha ran from his worldly responsibilities to pursue the path of awakening. The clergy of today, in stark contrast, face intense pressure both publicly and personally to resolve an existential contradiction that the Buddha himself could not face: how can one rectify the public expectations to live the ascetic, disciplined life of a world-renouncer with their worldly obligations to their family and their parishioners?

For those like Yanagi who struggle with these questions, the answer is often a life spent in perpetual guilt, a daily struggle to reconcile the high standards that *shugyō* has inculcated in him with the very real desires and urges which he shares with all humans. It's not fair, Yanagi conceded, but all he can do is endure.

Still, he tries to be optimistic. He told me that he recently read an article in a magazine which gave him some measure of comfort. According to this article, the best marriage is the one where the husband and wife don't talk to each other, even to the point

where they are living virtually separate lives. "That's the most comfortable way," he says. "And that's probably the only way for me."

Coming Home

Throughout the year, there are ample occasions for priests trained at Sōjiji to return to Tsurumi and participate once again in the ceremonial life of the temple. On one such occasion, I caught up in the halls with a priest that I had interviewed at his home temple and who had not been back to Sōjiji is a number of years. I asked him how it felt to be back.

"Whenever I come back to Sōjiji, I have a feeling of '*okaeri nasai.*'" *Okaeri nasai* is the traditional Japanese greeting offered to a household member upon their return to the family home after a time away, be it hours or years. As we walked through the temple's halls, the priest told me that he doesn't remember the exhaustion, or the restrictions, or even the perpetual sense of nervousness under the ever-present disciplining gaze. Instead, he remembered faces and voices, heard echoes of conversations and jokes. He told me that he can see his friends running through the halls beside him as they cleaned Sōjiji's wooden corridors together. He rememberd those priests above him who looked after his well-being, and who took a personal interest in molding him from a scared unsui into the priest he is today. Through Sōjiji's alumni group known as the Sanshōkai – he calls it an "OB *kai*" ("old boy's club") – he still kept in contact with many of the priests of he trained with. With pride, he states that the bonds of family he formed in Sōjiji's halls have lasted decades.

For the priests trained at Sōjiji, the days spent in *shugyō* will always have an important place in their lives: Sōjiji has been imprinted both on their bodies and on their identities. We have seen how *shugyō* does more than merely mold bodies: through the participatory reenactment of ritual practice, *shugyō* has the power to completely transform a person's view of the world and their understanding of their place within it.

Many priests express a sense that their time at Sōjiji made them a part of something larger then themselves, of being links on a chain that extends across rivers and mountains, across oceans, and across the centuries. They no longer belong to only one family: their *shugyō* has transformed the priests into custodians of their sect, their temple, their Dharma line, their legal family, and the families of their parishioners. When they leave Sōjiji, they leave with the understanding that their students – their sons – will become the next link in the chain, one day standing outside the Hall of the Waiting Phoenix in the cold sunlight of a March morning.

Chapter IV

Sanzen

The Sound of Zen

On any given Sunday, Sōjiji and its precincts are alive with the sounds and sights of activity. Spend even an hour doing nothing more than watching and listening and a person will come to understand that the sound of Zen in practice is far from silent.

From the Daisodō and the Hōkōdō, the deep boom of the large bell and metallic ring of the gong marks the rhythm for the *senzo kuyō* ceremonies which take place all day, with one ceremony blending seamlessly into another. As you approach the buildings, you can make out the drone of the chanting voices inside the halls.

A steady stream of visitors climbs the stairs to the Daisodō, likely drawn by the impressive size of the hall as they are by the sounds of activity coming from the inside. Upon entering the hall, the visitors' rituals are strikingly uniform: a pinch of incense is offered, a brief salute of *gasshō* and a bowing of the head is made. As a capstone to the visit, anywhere between several to a handful of coins are thrown into the massive wooden coffer which stands between the doorway and the inner hall. At other Buddhist temples in Japan, the quantity of coinage being offered gives the observer the auditory impression of being inside a cash register drawer. At Sōjiji, the sound of the coins falling through the

layers of wooden slats built into the coffer provides a staccato to the continuo of the ritual taking place in the inner hall. Many visitors will even time their offering of coins to conspicuously correspond with key moments in the ceremony.

In the garden outside the halls, human activity is similarly inescapable. Cars and taxis regularly drive up the paved driveway, bringing parishioners to the cemetery to visit their family graves. Tourists walk through the garden, stopping regularly for photographs directed by camera-holders trying in vain to capture both the people and the entirety of the buildings behind them. Other visitors are locals from Tsurumi for whom Sōjiji, sitting on its hill above the city, is a regular stop on their daily walks. Picnickers, often several mothers and their children together, will camp out on the green spaces underneath the trees. Their children are free to run around the temple buildings, their voices transforming the landscape from a disciplined space into a playground of discovery.

From the treetops, the crows that make Sōjiji their home call out to each other. The light wind that blows through the broad leaves of the evergreen trees rattles the wooden windows and doors of the halls in their frames.

Inside, a constant rumble of footsteps echoes through the temple halls. Groups of unsui barrel up and down the corridors of the temple on their way to various parts of the temple complex. Visiting tour groups – often between five and thirty people – are led through the halls by unsui who serve as tour guides, each step creaking the wood beneath their feet. Likewise, black-clad parishioner families are led through the halls in fifteen minute intervals on their way to their individually-sponsored ceremonies in the Hōkōdō or the Daisodō.

Every so often, a voice from the reception desk will come on the campus-wide PA system to make an announcement to the monastic community, audible from every part of the temple complex. The announcement always begins and ends with a noticeable pop as the microphone is turned on or off.

The bell in the clock tower is rung every twenty minutes, a constant reminder of the passage of time. If you do manage to lose track of the time, the daily newspaper will be delivered to the doors of several of Sōjiji's halls by motorbike courier precisely at three in the afternoon.

While all this takes place around them, the members of Sōjiji's Nichiyō Sanzenkai – the Sunday zazen group – sit cross-legged within the darkened hall known as the Shuryō in meditative silence. A sign outside the hall exhorts "Zazen in progress. Please be quiet."

The participants of the Sanzenkai are a mix of experienced practitioners and curious newcomers. The participants have come from all over Tokyo and Yokohama – some coming from over two hours away – to spend their Sunday afternoon at Sōjiji to sit on a cushion and gaze with downcast eyes at a wall for extended periods of time.

The newcomers will likely have heard of zazen through a book, magazine article, or television program extoling the benefits of meditative practice for a balanced modern lifestyle. For them, these first hours will pass slowly as their "modern" minds accustomed to the sensory barrage of everyday life distractedly jump from thought to thought and from worry to worry, often returning to the growing discomfort of forcing their body to sit erect and their legs folded in a manner that cuts off circulation.

Newcomers are surprised to know that the long-time practitioners' experience will be largely the same. However, after years of weekly practice, the more-experienced will have a better appreciation for the mental and physical efforts required of zazen practice. Or, more precisely, the efforts made in the quixotic pursuit of "non-thinking". This is the essence of the principle of *shikantaza*, "just sitting."

The long-timers will tell you that the books and magazines are right in that zazen helps to cultivate a sense of well-being, but they are right for the wrong reasons. Despite its simplicity, learning to "just sit" takes years of dedication and discipline; even then, the experience of completely immersing oneself in a single experience is elusive even for the most experienced practitioners. However, even the most dedicated practitioner must regularly remind themselves that, like all *shugyō*, it is not the end result that is transformative, but rather the dedication to which a person devotes themselves to the effort of disciplining mind and body.

But for now the participants sit on their cushions in the dimmed hall, staring at the wall. The distractions, noises and intrusions of the external and internal world sit on each person like "clouds upon a mountain peak."

♦♦

In this chapter, I will look closely at Sōjiji's Nichiyō Sanzenkai. In many ways, this group occupies a mediating position between the clergy and the laity of the Sōjiji. The Sanzenkai imagines itself as combining the best of both worlds: the group is comprised of lay persons who, for one afternoon a week, participate in *shugyō* that is meant to emulate that of the unsui.

I joined the Sanzenkai at Sōjiji the same week I arrived in Japan for my fieldwork. The Sanzenkai was an ideal entrée situation for a researcher: becoming a member was easy and inexpensive, and the group had long been accustomed to non-Japanese visitors. Moreover, I was able to observe and converse with a broad spectrum of people, and provided a forum by which I could be observed and conversed with in turn – an important means of building trust and rapport. I rarely missed a meeting of the Sanzenkai, especially in the beginning. As I would soon find out, this regular attendance set me apart from the majority of visitors and even new members, who would come once and rarely come again.

My regular participation in the Sanzenkai enabled me to quickly learn the basic manners and comportment necessary to avoid committing cultural *faux pas* in a Sōtō Zen temple. My body resisted being forced to move in ways that it never had before: the exacting precision of bodily movement in the zazen hall – sitting, walking and even standing – initially made sitting for even thirty minutes a painful ordeal.

As I struggled with leg pain and back pain, I also struggled with mental resistance to the discipline into which I was forcing myself. Hours spent with eyes downcast, staring at the wall was something that my mind – hardwired for constant activity and seeking constant stimuli – did not take lightly. It was on this cushion that I struggled with the push-and-pull of participant observation, now less an invaluable fieldwork technique then it was an insurmountable paradox. I forced myself to participate, always resisting the urge to turn around on my mat, take out my notebook and observe. To participate fully, I had to struggle internally to turn off the flashes of thoughts and observations. On that

cushion, I struggled alone – together with everyone in the hall – to overcome my conscious self.

While the Sanzenkai easily welcomed me as a member, the participants of the Sanzenkai were reluctant at first to open up to me as a researcher. In the beginning, I assumed that the Sanzenkai would provide a ready sample of people willing to go on the record to speak to me about their zazen practice. I was wrong. Even participants who took an interest in my research demurely deflected my requests for formal interviews, insisting that I should talk to a priest or someone who "knows more about zazen" then themselves. Pressing the issue led nowhere, and I came to realize that I needed a new strategy. Instead of insisting on a structured interview, I took a conscious step backwards and started to "just listen". This strategy paid off: not long after, fascinating and in-depth conversations with members of the Sanzenkai began to flow on their own.

Zazen

The practice of *zazen* is in many ways fundamental to the identity of the Sōtō Zen sect. The word *zen* is an abbreviation and localization of the Chinese *chan-na*, itself a transliteration of the Sanskrit word *dhyana*, and which, as a fourth-order rendering, is glossed into English as "meditation" (Sharf 2005: 260; Faure 2009: 77). The character "*za*" lends itself to a more simple reading, meaning "to sit." A common translation of *zazen* from Japanese to English, therefore, has been "seated meditation."

On the one hand, this translation allows for an expedient means of conveying to a non-specialist reader what the practice of zazen might be like. Thanks to popular media,

the word "meditation" conjures images of a person sitting cross-legged on a cushion, eyes closed and drawing deep breaths. In reality, this is not far off from the truth.

However, the translation of zazen as "seated meditation" – which I have avoided in this work – is problematic. Zazen in the Sōtō Zen sect is not "meditation," at least not in the way the word is understood in either English or by the Japanese gloss, *mokusō*. Grammatically speaking, "meditation" has a target: one meditates *on* something, be it an idea, image, phrase, or bodily process (like the breath). One can appropriately use the word "meditation" to refer to the practice of meditating on *koan* (the erstwhile "Zen riddles" such as the "sound of one hand clapping"), a practice favored by the Rinzai and Ōbaku Zen sects, as well as repeating a mantra, focusing on an image like a mandala, or any number of *vipassana* visualization techniques.

Instead of "meditation," zazen in the Sōtō Zen sect may more properly be described as "meditative." While the body is positioned as if it is in meditation, the brand of zazen put forth by the Sōtō Zen sect lacks a focal point upon which practitioners are supposed to focus. A practitioner is specifically instructed *not* to focus on any image or thought. One priest described it this way: "If meditation (*mokusō*) means 'focus on an object', then zazen is different. Zazen is also different from 'empty mind' (*mushin*). If empty mind happens during zazen, then it's by accident. It's not something you should focus on doing."

Instead, Sōtō practitioners are enjoined to "just sit" (*tada suwaru*): this is the core of the central Sōtō Zen concept of *shikantaza*. *Shikantaza*, as an idea, is elegant in its simplicity: any mental effort – even focusing on the act of not-focusing – is a tether that ties the mind to the material, and thus ephemeral and illusory, world. In the *Fukan*

Zazengi, Dōgen writes that the practitioner must "give up the operations of mind, intellect, and consciousness" and "stop measuring with thoughts, ideas, and views." Similarly, Keizan, writing in the *Zazen Yōjinki*, tells the practitioner to "sit without doing anything." By training the body to "just sit", a zazen practitioner ideally trains the mind to do the same. According to Sōtō Zen teachings, it was in this way that the Buddha was able to learn to let go of his mental associations and physical attachments. This perfect state where one lives fully in the present moment without the chain reaction of judgments about the past or the future is the essence of "enlightenment" or *satori*.

While simple, *shikantaza* should be recognized as a religious ideal. In this regard, the practice of zazen has a foundational place in the historical identity of the Japanese Sōtō Zen school, as it is through their roles as "inheritors" of this practice that the Zen clergy claim their legitimacy as heirs of the Buddha's teachings.

However, glossing *zen* as "meditation" also leads to another problem: the possibility of essentializing "meditation" as being *the* characteristic of Zen practice. As has been shown in the previous chapters, contemporary Sōtō Zen priests spend remarkably little of their lives in zazen – at best, an hour a day while undergoing the rigors of monastic training, and seldom ever after this training is done. To state categorically that zazen is the be-all of Zen practice – a commonly-held belief, as will be discussed below – is to miss 99% of the reality of religious practices of Sōtō Zen clergy and laity: namely, the regular performance of rituals and other liturgical practices like funerals and memorial services.

Worse, this identification with Zen as "meditation" contributes to a situation in which the public perceives that priests who are not perpetually meditating are somehow

"doing it wrong." For non-Japanese, in particular, this association between Zen and meditation fuels the Orientalist fantasy in which all Zen temples are places to do zazen and all Zen priests are fonts of enlightened wisdom: a misconception that often leads to disillusionment and resentment when the reality proves differently.

In this regard, it is another common misperception that all Zen temples have opportunities for the laypersons to practice zazen, the fact of the matter is that only a small fraction actually do – fewer than ten percent, by one estimate (Reader 1991: 103). Many seekers are surprised to find that in the vast majority of Sōtō Zen temples in Japan, zazen is not practiced at all: the diligent priest is the one who daily performs the proper respects to the ancestors of his temple's parishioner families.

As a training temple, Sōjiji can perhaps be held to a different standard: here, daily zazen is expected of the training priests. For many of the unsui, this will be the only time in their lives that they will practice zazen with any regularity. With public interest in zazen as a form of physical, mental, and spiritual cultivation increasing over the course of the 20th Century, it would be odd for the flagship of the Sōtō Zen sect not to offer the public a setting for the practice of zazen.

Nichiyō Sanzenkai

The Sunday Sanzenkai has been in existence since the earliest days of Sōjiji's new incarnation in Tsurumi, though its character has changed dramatically over the course of the century.

The word *sanzen*, as traditionally used in Chinese Ch'an and used today in Japanese Rinzai and Ōbaku Zen contexts, is used to refer to the act of a person who comes to learn at the feet of a wise Zen teacher. Dōgen, however, dramatically reinterpreted this usage in the "Zazengi" chapter of the *Shōbōgenzō*. The first lines of this fascicle state unequivocally that "*sanzen* is *zazen*" (*Sanzen wa zazen nari*). Dōgen's statement has been used in modern times to show how the Sōtō Zen sect "democratized" – or alternatively, "laicized" – *zazen* practice by removing the status differential inherent in the traditional usage: that of a petitioner humbly approaching a lofty master. Indeed, the remainder of the "Zazengi" fascicle details instructions for the proper practice of zazen, none of which require the presence of anyone but the practitioner.

Historically speaking, it was not the accessibility of zazen that gave Sōtō Zen its broad appeal, however: despite Dōgen's instructions, zazen was considered to be the sole purview of the clergy, rather than the laity. Indeed, the practice of zazen by the Sōtō Zen clergy contributed to their public mystique and perceived soteriological efficacy: the clerical practice of zazen was used to explain the priests' power over death itself, allowing them to perform funerals and memorial ceremonies for the laity that could bestow immediate enlightenment on the dead.

Following the sudden loss of political and economic influence in the wake of the Meiji Restoration, the Sōtō Zen sect – and indeed the Japanese Buddhist institution as a whole – scrambled to demonstrate their loyalty to the new political hegemony, as personified in the figure of the Emperor. Brian Victoria (1997) demonstrates that from 1904 to 1945 zazen was increasingly and publicly put forth by influential Zen clergy and scholars as a disciplining tool that could forge a powerful and obedient military and

citizenry that was unwavering in its loyalty to the Japanese polity (99; 144). This use of zazen to create obedient subjects of a totalitarian regime was ironically the strongest argument for the democratization of zazen practice: "Everyone in contemporary Japan could utilize the power of Zen, just as everyone could benefit from its 'strikingly clear and thorough teaching on life and death'" (Victoria 1997: 101).

As we saw in Chapter 1, Japanese Buddhism in the post-Meiji Era borrowed much from the playbook of Christian missionaries and churches. The Buddhist clergy, long accustomed to being the legally-mandated recipients of lay material and financial donations, now turned to missionary, charitable, and catechistic works in an effort to stay competitive in the widening religious field in Japan (Davis 1989: 331). Sōjiji, recently moved to Tsurumi, was in a unique position to reinvent itself and its efforts as a religious institution. Almost immediately following Sōjiji's official opening, a Sunday school (Nichiyō Gakkō) was established to encourage young people to identify with and benefit from Sōtō Zen teachings. Local women were similarly invited to join the temple's Women's Group (Fujinkai). The women of the Fujinkai provided a ready source of participants for ceremonies, but served a practical purpose by sewing and repairing the robes of the unsui as they took tea and listened to sermons. It is in this same vein that the Nichiyō Sanzenkai was established as a means for the temple to reach out to its new neighbors. With women and children having their own organizations, the Sanzenkai was primarily – though not exclusively – a men's group that would meet on Sundays to listen to the clergy deliver sermons.

This emphasis on sermons changed in the years following the Pacific War, and around 1950 the Nichiyō Sanzenkai was reborn as a group primarily interested in zazen.

Throughout the "Zen Boom" of the 1960s and 1970s Sōjiji was poised to attract much of the international interest in Zen, as made popular by the writings of authors such as Eugen Herrigel, D.T. Suzuki, Jack Kerouac, and Alan Watts. Owing to its fortunate placement between the port of Yokohama and what would become Haneda Airport, Sōjiji was uniquely positioned to attract the waves of international visitors who were arriving in Japan, looking for a "taste of Zen." Photographs of the Nichiyō Sanzenkai from the 1970s show an ethnically-diverse participant base, with international practitioners sitting alongside Japanese members. When Sōjiji's introspective turn came during the 1980s, the Sanzenkai followed suit. Participation by non-Japanese dropped off dramatically as the temple increasingly devoted more of its energies towards its Japanese parishioner base.

Today, the Sanzenkai is the largest and most accessible of lay organizations at Sōjiji, with over four hundred guests coming to try zazen each year. Of all the temple groups, the Sanzenkai remains the most equipped to handle non-Japanese speaking visitors, as a good number of members have conversational English skills out of educational or professional necessity. The Sanzenkai is established as a not-for-profit group, and the modest participation fee collected each week contributes to donation to the temple in gratitude for the use of space, purchasing and upkeep of cushions and slippers, as well as for incidental costs. A small group of volunteer officers (*sewanin*) form the administrative core of the group. Though officially under the auspices of Sōjiji's Propagation Section, the group's week-by-week operations is managed almost exclusively by these lay officers.

The Shuryō

The building known as the Shuryō sits directly across from the Sōdō on the western side of the temple. The Shuryō is one of the oldest buildings at Sōjiji, dating to the initial phase of construction of the monastery. The building was completed in 1915, and dedicated as the Monk's Hall in September of that same year.

In the years that followed, Sōjiji grew in size and reputation, attracting more monastic recruits than the hall could hold. When the current Sōdō was dedicated in 1933, the older hall was renamed the Shuryō, or Assembly Hall. No longer serving as a place to house and feed the monastic community, the Shuryō was repurposed as a study hall for the monks. Every day at 8am and 2pm, the community of unsui would gather in the hall to listen to a *teishō*, a lecture given by one of the superior priests expounding on a religious text. At all other times, the hall was available for the monks to quietly read, study, and memorize the many texts he would need to know as a fully-ordained Sōtō Zen priest. The sign-board over the entrance to the Inner hall is inscribed with the characters "*kokyō shōshin*": "illuminate your mind through the old teachings."

The Shuryō is architecturally similar to the current Sōdō in its construction, albeit on a more humble scale. Like the Sōdō, the Shuryō is constructed as an inner hall encircled by an outer hall, with platforms of tatami placed along the walls. Unlike the Sōdō, the platforms run lengthwise rather than widthwise along the walls of the Inner and outer halls. Architecturally, the limited number of mats restricts the number of people who can sleep comfortably in the hall to about thirty. However, since three people can sit on a single tatami mat, the Shuryō can comfortably seat three times this many, making it

ideal for a room dedicated to study and zazen. Today, the room is arranged to seat ninety-four, and more cushions can be added if needed.

In its center sits a statue of Juntei Kannon attended by two Dragon Kings, a donation to Sōjiji by the Bishō Tokugawa family. The many-armed, three-faced image of Kannon rising from a lotus flower is a representation of compassion, rising out of the "mire" of the world to provide hope for the salvation of all living things. This statue of Kannon serves as a complement to the statue of Manjū enshrined in the Sōdō, and together the two represent the dual nature of the ideal Buddhist monastic: an image of perpetual and perfect discipline on the one hand, and a paragon of compassion and a model for all living beings on the other.

Since the construction of the three-story Denkōkaku, a modern-style building with classrooms and a lecture hall for the unsui, the Shuryō has become primarily a hall for lay use. It remains empty for most of the time, but sees the most use on weekends when visiting tour groups and corporate and school retreats commonly make use of the Shuryō for zazen. In 1999, it was announced that as part of the "Open Sōjiji" policy the Shuryō would be made open for use by anyone who wanted to use it, at any time. While this policy has since been rescinded (reservations are now necessary), most visitors who come to Sōjiji to experience zazen will leave with lasting memories of the Shuryō.

On Sunday afternoons, of course, the room belongs to the Nichiyō Sanzenkai. So strong is the affiliation between the Sanzenkai and the space of the Shuryō, the two are almost synonymous to many in the group, occasionally leading to a feeling that borders on possessiveness concerning the hall.

Unlike the Monk's Hall, seats in the Shuryō are not assigned, and in theory people are free to sit wherever they like. However, in practice, there is a tendency for long-time members to arrive early to claim "their" seats – a particular mat or even a particular cushion where they tend to sit week after week. There is an unspoken, but implicit, logic to this arrangement: more experienced members replicate the hierarchical seating of the Sōdō such that the eastern side of the hall is populated by long-term members, in order of seniority, as they would be organized in the Monk's Hall. A new member entering the Inner hall would likely see this patterning over their first weeks, and soon learn not to look for seats on the eastern side, even if they are free.

Newer members, in contrast, tend to sit in the outer hall that encircles the outside wall of inner hall. Again, nowhere is it stated that this is the "place" for new members, but by and large, less-experienced practitioners will choose to sit there for quite some time after they have joined the Sanzenkai, in addition to several long-time members who have grown comfortable sitting there over a period of months or years.

Their reasons for doing so are varied: one woman commented that she felt that the relatively confined outer hall (with lower ceilings and walking room only two body-widths wide) allowed her to keep her focus better than in the openness of the Inner hall. One long-time male practitioner stated that he preferred the outer hall *because* of the regular distractions taking place outside of the Shūryō's walls: "the point of zazen is to teach us not to hold on to distractions," he told me. "Why would I want to sit in a place where there are no distractions to practice letting go of?" Another man said that since he consistently arrives late, he always goes for a seat in the outer hall, since he is more likely

to disturb people needlessly if he walks around the inner hall in an attempt to find an empty seat.

Still, hierarchical distinctions do play a part in many practitioners' choice to sit in the outer hall. The inner hall is by virtue of its design a high-stakes environment: one's practice – including any missteps or faux pas – is thought to be more visible in the open space of the inner hall than it is in the periphery. Consequently, the inner hall has become by reputation the place where the "serious" practitioners sit. One new member commented to me that he thought I was brave for choosing to sit in the Inner hall so soon after joining the group. When I asked him why he didn't sit there, he replied that he felt that he wasn't quite "ready" to sit in the Inner hall. He assumed that he would know when it was his time to move into the Inner hall, but had not yet gathered the courage to do so.

Membership and Motivations

On any Sunday afternoon, anywhere between fifty and one hundred practitioners representing the spectrum of Japanese society will come to Sōjiji to attend the Sanzenkai. Weather, temperature and time of year have dramatic, though predictive, effects on attendance: more people will show up on a temperate April afternoon than on a cold January or sweltering August day. The average attendance at a Sanzenkai meeting is sixty people, making Sōjiji's Nichyō Sanzenkai one of the biggest zazen groups in Japan. Attendance by over eighty participants is considered exceptional, with long-time members audibly "ooh-ing" when the daily total is read during announcements at the end of the day. Of these participants, between five and twenty people will be first-time

visitors, with roughly half of this number introducing themselves to the group as "new members" (*nyūkaisha*).

This last figure should strike the reader as curious. Assuming six new members per week, the Sanzenkai should see an increase of approximately three hundred new members over the course of a year. Indeed, this is precisely what the official numbers show: in an accounting meeting held in January 2007, the Sanzenkai reported 295 new members over the previous year, up from 287 a year earlier. Further, as of 2007, the Nichiyō Sanzenkai boasted just shy of four thousand officially registered members – 3,992, to be exact. On paper, all of the other lay groups at Sōjiji put together have only a fraction of the membership of the Sanzenkai.

These numbers require some explanation, however: the figure of four thousand members represents the total number of *registered* members, not active members. If one were to look at active membership, fewer than one quarter of one percent of the official membership will ever be accounted for during a regular Sunday practice. When I mentioned this to one of the officers of the group, I was told that a long-standing joke is that "if all of the members of the Sanzenkai decided to show up on the same day, the line would stretch all the way down to Tsurumi Station."

Why, then, is there such a dramatic difference between the official membership number and the number of actual practitioners? One answer might be the low cost of membership: when a person comes to the Sanzenkai for the first time they are given the option between a "one-day experience" (*ichinichi taiken*) and full membership in the group. While the one-day experience is 200 yen, the one-time "membership fee" – which comes with a welcome packet containing instructions for zazen, a map, a membership

certificate, and a slim sect-published handbook titled "Essentials of Sanzen" (*Sanzen Yōten*) – is only slightly more expensive at 700 yen. Since membership in the Sanzenkai comes with no additional personal or financial obligation, many first-time participants simply find the full "membership" to be the better deal. It is easy to hand over an additional 500 yen coin: the cost differential is negligible, and you get something tangible in return.

The timing of this decision presents an interesting problem, however: a visitor will be asked if they want to pay for a one-day participation or for full membership at the registration desk, *before* they actually sit their first session of zazen. The visitor will have no idea at the time they need to make a decision whether or not zazen practice is something that they even like, much less want to continue.

From what I observed sitting in the reception room, there is absolutely no pressure put on a visitor to join the group from the Sanzenkai volunteers. However, there does seem to be a momentum that builds after one person in the reception line decides to join the group: the very act of seeing the person ahead of you receive the membership packet for five hundred yen more seems to motivate the people seated behind them to do the same, even if they only came to Sōjiji for the one-day experience.

Since no personal information other than a name is collected at the time of membership, there is no way of contacting those who register for the group who show up only one or two more times, or those who simply never return. It is, of course, impossible to tell at a glance who would return to the Sanzenkai and who would not. Statistically speaking, however, the odds of a new member returning becoming a regular participant

were astonishingly small. Most "new members" came for one session, and never came again.

I was surprised to hear that neither the Sanzenkai nor Sōjiji's Fukyō-ryō (Propagation Section) had ever sponsored a survey to ask visitors about their motivation to try zazen, or their experiences at Sōjiji. This is not to say that it hadn't been discussed: the Sanzenkai had decided that a need to maintain a policy of privacy and non-intrusion was more important than potentially alienating members by asking them to answer questions about attendance. The Sanzenkai, they told me, existed " to help people sit and find quiet," and did not want to associate itself with the high-pressure tactics associated with religious proselytization. As one officer of the group explained to me, "zazen is a very personal thing, and we don't want to scare people away. If a person likes zazen, they'll come back. If not, they won't."

However, as I got to know the regularly attending members while observing the weekly visitors and new members, I began to notice some interesting demographic trends. While women account for more than half of visitors and new members, among regularly attending members, men outnumber women by approximately a six to one margin. Similarly, based on visual estimates, the average age of a visitor or new member (male and female) is mid-thirties to mid-forties. In contrast, the mean age of the forty-one regular members who shared with me their age was fifty-seven years.

This is an interesting finding: according to conversations with the priests at Sōjiji and scholars of Japanese religion, there has been a growing interest in zazen and the "Zen Lifestyle" in recent years, particularly among Japanese women in their thirties and forties. Popular media – magazines, books and television programs – aimed towards women

extol the virtues of zazen for dealing with the stresses of everyday life and for general well-being. It is not merely in zazen that Zen finds an audience: food magazines, like the July 2007 issue of *Sarai* magazine, feature cover stories on the benefits of the vegetarian cooking found in Zen monasteries for "waking up the 'Buddha-mind' (*busshin*) inside yourself."

The question must be asked: why is the demographic group that is the most likely to have an interest in zazen practice – women between the ages of 20 and 40 – the very group least likely to stay around?

Some conversations and observations over the course of my research were very instructive as to possible reasons for the low retention rate of younger members and women generally. It was my experience that many "one-timers" – members who enrolled in the group, but never came back – joined the group with the best of intentions. The pressures and time constraints of jobs and family were one of the main reasons people cited for not continuing with the Sanzenkai at Sōjiji. One woman really enjoyed her experience of zazen at Sōjiji, but since that first meeting, simply had not found the time to return. She worked full-time as a nurse while attending night classes: a six-hour commitment on Sunday – four hours of the Sanzenkai itself and commuting time – just was too much for her to regularly commit to participation. "I always think to myself, 'This week, I'll go,'" she told me. "But when Sunday comes, I always have something to do." I heard a similar story from several other people who acknowledged that their experience of zazen was a welcome break from their always-on-the-go daily lives, but who ironically could not find the time to sit zazen a second time.

Other reasons for short-term membership hint at a disjunction between expectations generated by representations of zazen in the popular media and the realities of zazen practice in a temple setting. One man had attended Sōjiji's Sanzenkai three or four times since joining, but complained that the group was too big and impersonal. He preferred to find a smaller zazenkai closer to his home, where he might have a chance to interact and ask questions of the temple priest. One woman found that zazen really wasn't what she thought it would be, and found a yoga group that gave her the spiritual and meditative outlet she was looking for. Another man thought that zazen would be a good way of deepening his martial arts practice, but left Sōjiji after complaining that zazen practice there was too "easy." Several people reported that their first experience was marred by the discomfort of sitting and feelings of stress and anxiety they felt when left only with their thoughts.

However, the most troubling answer came from a woman named Ms. Kojima, a three year member of the Sanzenkai. Ms. Kojima enjoyed zazen practice and "loved" the atmosphere at Sōjiji, but struggled with her sense that Sōjiji's Sanzenkai is an unwelcoming environment for younger, female practitioners. During an interview at a local coffee shop, Ms. Kojima told me that whatever relief she felt while sitting zazen was undone by the overly-strict and critical environment perpetuated by the older men of the group. "It is not a place where women can feel at ease," she told me, her voice almost a whisper. "When I first started here, I didn't know what *kinhin* [meditative walking] was. Just after I joined, one man pushed me from behind when I was walking too slowly. The week after, someone yelled at me because I didn't know which way to go. As a woman, I don't get to enjoy the feeling of zazen because I always feel as if someone is watching

me. I think it would be different if I were a man. I'm always nervous about making mistakes."

Unlike the cases mentioned above, Ms. Kojima made an effort to attend the Sanzenkai at Sōjiji at least once a month. Still, her negative experiences were difficult for her to overcome, at one point emotionally preventing her from attending the group for four months. While I cannot speak to how pervasive experiences like Ms. Kojima's are among other women who may have been inclined to be more permanent members, the relatively low retention rate for women led me to believe that hers cannot be an isolated case.

The Fukyō-ryō does what it can to introduce younger people to the benefit of zazen – for example, sponsoring overnight zazen retreats for the students of Tsurumi Girl's High School and Tsurumi University. For its part, the Sanzenkai does its best to accommodate the priorities of the Fukyō-ryō. However, assuming that all of the reasons given above are true, an even simpler scenario might be the culprit for members not returning to the Sanzenkai: namely, that the membership in the group is caught in a circular pattern. Since the Sanzenkai is comprised largely of older men, younger visitors may simply feel that the group caters primarily to older men, and is therefore not for them. The Sanzenkai and Fukyō-ryō does what it can to combat this reputation, and the Sanzenkai's presence in temple literature and on the internet is intended to appeal to the widest possible audience. Still, the message that "everyone is welcome" may not coincide with what a visitor sees.

Using a combination of a short, anonymous survey and informal interviews, I was able to communicate with a sample of forty-one returning members of the Sanzenkai,

allowing me to paint a better picture of the active group membership. My informants ranged in age from 29 to 74 years old, with an average age of 57 years. Practitioners are highly educated, with 75% of respondents having a college degree or higher.

Respondents' experience with zazen ranged from six months to twenty years, with an average of nine years. On average, participants had spent seven years as a member of Sōjiji's Sanzenkai. Over half of the group had experience with zazen prior to joining the Sanzenkai, often from a local temple, or through participation at an overnight retreat at Eiheiji.

Compared to other lay groups at Sōjiji, the members of the Sanzenkai were the least likely to participate in other activities at the temple such as the monthly sermon (less than a quarter had ever attended), the vegetarian cooking classes (only one respondent out of forty had attended), or the monthly sutra-copying classes (only two out of forty). In contrast, of the members of the Baikakō (see Chapter 5), 83% had attended a monthly sermon, and over a quarter had attended the cooking classes and/or sutra-copying class.

Similarly, members of the Sanzenaki were least likely of the lay organizations to participate in religious ceremonies and festivals held at Sōjiji such as Hatsumōde (New Year), Setsubun (Lunar New Year), or Ōbon. While this does not necessarily demonstrate a lower rate of religiosity, it does demonstrate a lower rate of *affiliation* with Sōjiji, despite the fact that the groups overall contain a comparable number of registered parishioners of Sōjiji. Sanzenkai members may practice zazen at Sōjiji, but compared to other temple groups, they do not consider Sōjiji to be "their temple" – that is, as a place to go to fulfill their religious needs and obligations. From my informants' responses, this is not surprising: of the forty-one people I spoke with, only fourteen identified with the

Sōtō Zen sect as their primary religious affiliation, and of these, only three were parishioners of Sōjiji. Of the remaining respondents, fifteen identify with a different sect of Japanese Buddhism, and twelve told me that they do not identify as being a member of any organized religion at all.

The motivations that brought these members to zazen practice are therefore understandably diverse. The most common response to the question "Why did you start practicing zazen?" was to talk about a period of personal crisis or reevaluation in that person's life, with over a third of interviewees responding in this manner. While some mentioned a lasting sense of stagnation or disillusionment in their lives, for others the crisis was more acute: a loss of employment, a divorce or heartbreak, a death of a relative or friend often lead people to turn to zazen to cope with their feelings. Several people independently spoke of "losing their path" or of "seeking relief from their worries". One member described his motivation to come to grips with the transiency of life after his mother suddenly passed away.

A striking example of finding zazen through personal crisis was Mr. Satake, a middle-aged businessman from Tokyo. About five years before I met him, Mr. Satake was on a downward spiral of self-destruction. The pressures of his job and his failing marriage led him to drink too much, but the breaking point happened when his father passed away. "When my father died, I went crazy," he told me. His wife divorced him, and he came close to hitting bottom through drinking and gambling.

Nearing his lowest point, his mother told him that, as oldest son, he was responsible for the memorial rituals for his father. He knew that his family was parishioners of Sōjiji, but he knew nothing about Sōtō Zen. He knew that every sect of

Japanese Buddhism had some practice that distinguished it from the others, so he searched the Internet. Every search he did came up with references to Dōgen and zazen. Mr. Satake started reading books on zazen. Soon after, he visited Sōjiji's Nichiyō Sanzenkai.

Zazen was an immediate fit for him. For months, he never missed a single meeting. Soon, he was waking up every morning at 4am ("even on my days off," he adds) to sit zazen for an hour before work, a routine which helps him deal with the stresses of his job. He credits zazen for helping him learn to deal productively with his problems and for turning his life around.

This perception of zazen as a "therapy" for the stressors or maladies in one's life was a common theme during my conversations. Another take on a similar theme was to see zazen practice as prophylactic: these people sought out zazen as a means of *preventing* the stress that came with their responsibilities before it became problematic. A common reply was that zazen helped to maintain "spiritual balance" (*seishin antei*). One member, a retired company worker, described how zazen helped him to develop this "spiritual balance" by being able to focus on his work but also allowing him to let go of stress at the office and at home.

Along this vein, several respondents reported first being exposed to zazen during training retreats sponsored by their employers "to foster better relationships between people as well as to reduce stress in the office." Although these retreats have fallen out of vogue in recent years, they were popular in the 1970s and 1980s as a means of cultivating a culture of the "corporate warrior." The retreats were often overnight or weekend affairs at Zen temples led by priests who doubled as corporate training consultants. In addition

to team building exercises, the retreats would incorporate aspects of Zen philosophy and practices in order to develop a disciplined (and more importantly, obedient) corps of employees (Rohlen 1979; Victoria 1997). Similarly, high schools and colleges also sponsor zazen retreats, advocating the use of zazen as a means to create a diligent and productive student body.

Several long-time practitioners remember finding initial inspiration to practice zazen in the work of authors such as D. T. Suzuki, Thich Naht Hanh, and "Homeless" Sawaki Kōdō, as well as Dōgen himself. Others had first encountered the idea in a magazine or newspaper. One man told me simply that, "I had read about zazen in magazine, and I wondered what it was, so I came to Sōjiji."

Lastly, three informants were inspired by family members who were themselves avid practitioners of zazen. In two of the three cases, the relative was a grandfather: one woman told me that memories of her grandfather sitting zazen when she was a child was what motivated her to begin practicing zazen when he passed away, as a way of remembering and sharing in an activity that he was passionate about. Similarly, another member recalled his sitting zazen as a middle-school student with his grandfather, who encouraged his practice by saying that it would make him successful in school and in work. The member regretted not finding the time to do zazen during his career, but as a retiree and a grandfather himself, he is an assiduous practitioner, encouraging his own grandchildren to sit in zazen with him.

Checking In

The Nichiyō Sanzenkai's schedule is featured prominently on Sōjiji's website in both Japanese and English. Officially, the Sanzenkai begins at 1pm, but more dedicated participants generally begin arriving at around noon to take advantage of the free sitting time available before the scheduled starting time.

Unlike most other visitors to the temple, Sanzenkai participants are free to bypass Sōjiji's main reception hall entirely and enter the temple from one of the entrances closer to the Shuryō. A small wooden cubby for shoes is set up by the westernmost entrance of the temple's long corridor for this purpose.

On the lower floor of the Denkōkaku, the Sanzenkai has been given a semi-permanent office. The room itself is small, large enough only for a small bookshelf, a cabinet, and several tables. The bookshelf is stocked with back issues of Sōjiji's self-published literature as well as a limited library of books on Zen, many written by former temple clergy. A table along the wall is stocked with literature and pamphlets including a photocopied map of the Shūryō, indicating the correct way to move through the hall, as well as small stacks of literature published by the Sōtō Zen central administration or one of its satellites. A blackboard with the day's schedule hangs conspicuously on the wall, its content illegible to anyone who does not know the specialized vocabulary of the group.

Every Sunday afternoon starting at 12:30, the room becomes a reception desk, staffed by up to three officers of the Sanzenkai. Members will queue up by kneeling on the tatami floor in seiza in front of a table to sign their name in the register book and to

pay the participation fee of 200 yen. After the transaction, both parties will bow in gasshō, and the member will stand up and walk out of the room.

Across the hall from the reception, two rooms – one for men, another for women – are set aside as changing rooms and places to store bags and belongings. Conversation is limited in these rooms, not for any reasons of respectful silence, but because most participants are content to make their greetings and then get to the sitting hall as quickly as possible. The majority will simply deposit their belongings along the wall and leave, while a handful will use the space to change into their zazen attire.

Both Dōgen and Keizan thought it necessary to briefly address proper attire for zazen practice in their writing. In Dōgen's several manuals concerning zazen, his only mention of clothing is for the practitioner to "loosen their robe and belt" and to wear the monk's *kesa* (Bielefeldt 1988: 178-79). Keizan, in the *Zazen Yōjinki*, advises practitioners only to avoid either dirty or luxurious clothing, and to mend and clean their garments before sitting zazen.

In this regard, it is important to remember that both Dōgen and Keizan's instructions were intended primarily for a world-renouncing, monastic audience, as opposed to the unordained laity; the monastic practitioners likely did not need additional instructions on clothing, as proper clothing for Sōtō Zen clerics was addressed in the Rules (*shinggi*) that governed life in a temple. Suggestions that clothing worn in the zazen *dōjō* should be comfortable, and in "cool" colors such as blues, browns, and blacks were later extrapolations from the Sōtō Patriarchs' writings, added to bring a measure of decorum and consistency to lay zazen practice.

In actual practice, members of Sōjiji's Sanzenkai are largely free to wear whatever they wished. Only a small minority – visual estimates place the number at no more than fifteen or twenty men and women – will change into the traditional *hakama* training outfit used primarily in the martial arts, or a *samue.* An equal number will arrive already wearing or change into sweatpants, while the greater majority of the group will stay in their street clothes such as jeans or slacks.[1]

The clothes a person wears for zazen are a not-so-subtle public declaration of how dedicated that person is to their zazen practice. The wearing of jeans or tight slacks is seen as a "rookie mistake," as such clothing is not intended to be worn for long periods of time in a cross-legged position. The stiffness of the material is likely to be uncomfortable at best, but the fabric's inflexibility leads to folds that reduce circulation in the legs leading to numbness and extreme discomfort. Similarly, the Shūryō is drafty, and people wearing t-shirts or light tops would find themselves chilly on all but the hottest of summer days.

While those wearing sweatpants or tracksuits are definitely more aware of the need for flexibility during zazen, those who wear a *samue* or *hakama* are described by others as "*honkakuteki*", an adjective that conveys "earnestness" or "seriousness". Like any conspicuous item, these clothing are functionally identical to sweatpants, in that they are comfortable and allow for the legs to move freely. However, by being expensive and individualizing, these specialized garments grant their wearer the appearance of "earnest"

[1] I came to take this leniency for granted, and was personally censured for my attire on two occasions: once, during my first weeks in Japan, I was asked to leave an evening zazen group at a small temple in Tokyo because I was wearing a very comfortable, but "improper," red and gold soccer jersey that I had worn to Sōjiji's Sanzenkai that same day without issue. The second occasion occurred many months later when one of the women of the Sōjiji Sanzenkai pulled me aside and told me that wearing shorts was "disrespectful" in the *dōjō*. I explained to her that I was wearing shorts because there was a typhoon raging outside. Since I walked three kilometers from my apartment to Sōjiji, shorts were the only thing I could reasonably expect to keep dry in such weather.

dedication to zazen practice. A cotton *samue* might cost between 10,000 and 20,000 yen ($83 and $163), the same price of a run-of-the-mill polyester *hakama* set. Either of which would set the wearer apart from those who are considered to be less-experienced, but one or two long-term members wear elegant cotton *hakama* that look as if they cost many times the amount of a starter set. In fairness, however, not all long-term members feel a need to look the part of the expert: the man who has been in the Sanzenkai the longest – over twenty years in 2007 – happily wears faded grey sweatpants.

Socks – or more specifically, knowledge of when they should be worn – is another distinguishing factor between new and long-time practitioners. Socks are not permitted in the Shuryō at any time, but ironically *are* required for those several times of the year that the Sanzenkai is invited to the Daisodō to participate in a temple ceremony. On these occasions, socks should ideally be white, but even darker socks are preferable to going barefoot. Long-time members know to keep an extra pair of white socks in their bags in the off-chance that there is a ceremony, but less-experienced members often find themselves embarrassed by being publicly corrected for wearing socks during zazen, or for *not* wearing socks during a ceremony. This is a trap that is largely avoidable only by the experience of trial and error.

Perhaps the most conspicuous status-granting item worn by Sanzenkai members is the *rakusu*, the bib-like garment which serves as a utilitarian stand-in for the monastic *kesa*. Laypersons who wear the *rakusu* have participated in a ceremony known as *zaike tokudo*, a modification of the clerical *shukke tokudo* ceremony discussed in Chapter 2. In this ceremony, a layperson accepts the sixteen Sōtō Zen precepts and becomes a disciple of an established priest, but does not take the complete plunge into "home leaving", i.e.

becoming a member of the Sōtō clergy. The *rakusu* is inscribed on its reverse with a calligraphic "certificate" from the teacher, as well as the date and details of the ceremony.

The interesting thing about participation in the *zaike tokudo* ceremony is that it results in a situation in which the participant is, to borrow from Richard Jaffe (2000) "neither monk nor layman." While clearly a symbol of dedication, the *rakusu* leaves aside the question of "dedication to *what*?": many *rakusu* wearers report that they are not particularly "religious," but rather formed a relationship with a charismatic teacher with whom they wished to affiliate themselves. At other times, the *rakusu* is given to contributing lay parishioners of a temple. The *rakusu* in this regard is a complicated status symbol which paradoxically demonstrates both proximity and distance from both the clergy and from inexperienced practitioners: the bearer is *almost* clergy and *almost* a layperson, but not quite either. As we will see, this liminal status on the part of a dedicated minority has had important ramifications in the history of the Sanzenkai.

The Complicated Art of "Just Sitting"

After leaving their bags in the changing rooms, a participant is free to seat themselves in the Shuryō. Upon entering the hall, the participant will take a pair of slippers from a rack on the wall and, as quietly as they can, move through the hall to find an empty seat.

The close attention to detail that is paramount for zazen practice begins the moment a person enters the hall.[2] Participants are told to keep their hands held in *shashu*,

[2] In theory, the attention to detail begins even before this, as practitioners are instructed to eat a light meal so as not to be so full that they fall asleep, but not hungry enough to cause a person to focus on their desire

a position in which the left hand is held in a fist over the heart with the right hand covering. When crossing over the threshold into the hall itself, a person must keep their left shoulder to the left door frame, remembering to enter the hall left foot first.

For those entering the inner hall, the process is repeated, with the practitioner stopping to hold their hands in gasshō and bow their heads toward the image of Kannon. The rules for moving through the inner hall are carefully proscribed, and to the beginner are quite daunting. One can pass to the left of the image of Kannon, but never to its right.[3] If one wants to sit in the front of the room, they have to walk around the center islands and approach from the back. One can sit anywhere, except the four cushions that flank both entrances. For an unsui, proper movement in the hall is a drill that is part of their monastic repertoire. For a layperson unfamiliar with such ritualized movement through space, moving in the inner hall is fraught with the danger of committing an embarrassing faux pas.

When an available spot is located, the participant will pull the *zafu* cushion forward, place it on its side and fluff it until it is nearly spherical. With their seat properly prepared, the participant will then bow in gasshō twice in greeting – once to the other practitioners sitting next to them, and once again to those sitting across from them.

The next step takes a little practice. Every platform of tatami mats in the Shuryō has an approximately six-inch wooden lip known as a *jōen* that is used for meals. The trick, therefore, is for a person to seat themselves on their cushion without their buttocks

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to eat. Similarly, the official zazen manuals provide instructions for washing the feet, but this practice is not observed by the Sanzenkai, or at any other zazen group that I have observed.

[3] The practice likely has its roots in the daily customs of India that were later imported to China and Japan as part and parcel of Buddhist practice. In these customs, the right hand is favored over the "unclean" left hand. Thus, if you are circumambulating a religious image, it is proper to always keep your right hand facing it.

or feet touching the wooden lip. Since the platform is about three feet off of the ground, the effort to avoid the *jōen* takes on the appearance of acrobatics, with people using their arms to carefully guide themselves onto their cushion, and then slide their cushion backwards hoping that their feet and buttocks clear the surface of the *jōen.*

Once a participant is safely on the tatami, they will take a few moments rocking back and forth to adjust the cushion to the shape and contours of their lower body. When this is done, they will fold – and in some cases, pull by force – their legs into one of several cross-legged positions. The two most accepted sitting positions for zazen are *hankafuza* ("half lotus") and *kekkafuza* ("full lotus"). Of the two, *kekkafuza* is the more difficult, requiring substantial flexibility in the joints of the hips, knees, and ankles in order to get both feet on the opposite thighs. While this puts strain on each of the joints, the benefit is a firm base with three points of contact with the floor (both knees and the buttocks) which reduces strain on the back.

In contrast, *hankafuza* simply requires folding the right leg over the left and does not cause nearly as much strain on the joints. For this reason, it is recommended to newer practitioners. The tradeoff here is that *hankafuza* necessitates that the sitter overuse the muscles of the lower back in order to sit up straight. After sitting in this position for an extended period of time, the back begins to fatigue, first in the lower back, and then radiating into the shoulders and neck.[4]

While the ability to sit in *hankafuza* is doctrinally accepted – Dōgen describes it in the *Fukan Zazengi* – there is nevertheless a measure of stigma attached to it. The ideal for experienced zazen practitioners is *kekkafuza*, the more difficult and ostensibly the

[4] While the cross-legged positions are the most accepted, I have seen individuals do zazen while kneeling in *seiza* with their cushions between their legs to reduce pressure on the joints, as well as sitting flat-footed in chairs. These individuals are by far the exception, and not the rule.

more “authentic” position: indeed, religious iconography commonly depicts the Buddha sitting in full lotus position. Among themselves, long-time members pay attention to who sits in which position, and the ability to sit in *kekkafuza* becomes another measure by which a person’s skill and dedication can be compared.

While *hankafuza* is certainly easier than either *kekkafuza* or the kneeling *seiza*, the fact remains that modern Japanese spend as much time in chairs as any of their post-industrial counterparts. The result is that the Japanese – like anyone else not physically accustomed to sitting in certain positions for extended periods of time – find the seated positions used in zazen to be uncomfortable and even painful. Physical sensations in the legs and back can range from a “pins-and-needles” feeling to a dull numbness to throbbing inflammation, and often cycling through all of the above. The modern body simply isn’t used to being coerced into such positions.

In sermons and in conversation, the Sōtō Zen clergy lament this transformation of modern Japanese society into an “*isu seikatsu*,” or “chair lifestyle.” From this perspective, the rise of the use of the chair in homes and the workplace over the course of the last century corresponds with the decline of traditional Japanese morals, values, and customs. While not an evil in and of itself “*isu seikatsu*” has become a metonym for all that is wrong with modern society: the chair represents laziness, anxiety, selfishness, violence, a loss of respect for authority, and a weakening of the family. Indeed, in this usage, the “chair lifestyle” is contrasted with more “traditional” modes of sitting, which by association correspond with a nostalgic view of the Japan of the past as ordered, harmonious, holistic, and cooperative.

A corollary of this is the hope that if the "chair lifestyle" can be unlearned – or at least compartmentalized – there is still a chance for modern society to be redeemed. For many in the clergy, encouraging others to undertake the process of redisciplining the body to be able to sit zazen carries the urgency of a public service program. Part of the message is that the Japanese of former times knew that enduring discomfort was a virtue in itself: cultivating the ability to mentally overcome discomfort is an inescapable part of effectively disciplining the body and mind.

Indeed, the connection between traditional styles of sitting and an idealized Japanese society of the past invokes the specters of cultural essentialism: as one priest explained it to me, "Americans think that painful things equal bad things. However, we Japanese see discomfort as part of *shugyō*, and something that has to be gotten used to. For us, pain is an opportunity." On the flip side, racialized notions of biology also came into play: on one occasion, I found myself being criticized for not sitting in *kekkafuza*. My critic pointed out that my choosing to sit in *hankafuza* was indicative of laziness and a weak spirit on my part. His rationale was that since "*gaijin* [non-Japanese] have longer legs than Japanese do," sitting cross-legged was biologically easier for me than for Japanese people. By not sitting in *kekkafuza*, I was demonstrating to him that I was unwilling to subject myself to even the mildest of hardships – a critique that he would later extend to Americans in general.

Shikantaza

Once the practitioner is properly seated on their cushion, they will compose themselves and wait for one of the unsui assigned as a hall monitor (*jikidō*) to come by with the *kyōsaku.* At each row of tatami, the monitor stops and raises the stick in offering. The practitioners salute him in gasshō, bowing as he passes. When the monitor has done a full walk-through of the entire hall, the session begins.

The session of zazen begins non-ceremoniously. A metal gong is struck three times to announce the beginning of the period. The practitioners turn clockwise to face the wall. The lights in the hall are dimmed to the bare minimum. After that, silence.

Suddenly the hall becomes a kind of sensory deprivation chamber. In an environment in which external distractions are minimized, the zazen practitioner is left alone with their body and mind for an uncomfortable period of time.

A beginner will likely focus on the physical sensations that come with redisciplining the body. Along with proper positioning of the lower body, practitioners have been instructed to regulate the breathing by inhaling and exhaling slowly through the nose. Further, unlike other forms of meditation, the eyes are kept open, keeping the gaze at a forty-five degree angle in front of them. The hands are placed in the sitter's lap, in a position known as *hokka jōin*, the "cosmic mudra." In this position, the right hand cups the left hand while the two thumbs touch, forming an egg-shape that is said to "contain the whole universe."

Many new practitioners will spend much of their time shifting, adjusting, and correcting their position. The fact that the body is not "relaxed" during zazen comes as a

surprise to many newcomers. Indeed, this new bodily hexis contains quite a bit to remember: in addition to enduring the growing discomfort in the legs without changing positions, the sitter must keep their back perfectly straight, breathe slowly, not move their head from side to side, not yawn, not close their eyes, and keep their hands perfectly positioned. Interestingly, it is this last, seemingly minor, point that is of the utmost importance. According to experts, the best way to know the internal state of the practitioner is by watching the bridge formed by the thumbs touching: if the bridge has collapsed, the sitter has become lax or distracted.

In this regard, it is not surprising that the single most commonly asked question following a zazen gathering is how long the discomfort will last before it begins to get better. As one member explained to me, "I thought it would be exciting when the pain finally went away. I looked forward to that moment. But it was a slow process. Gradually, it just got easier for me. I was able to sit zazen for longer and longer." Through repeated practice and constant policing of the body, the unfamiliar positions required to sit in zazen becomes more familiar and easier to maintain.

But the redisciplining of the body is only a first step. The logic of *shugyō* is based on the principle that the disciplined body leads to a disciplined mind. However, one does not lead effortlessly to the other. Even when the body is mastered, practitioners face a greater struggle: a wandering mind.

In the *Fukan Zazengi*, Dōgen gives the zazen practitioner the cryptic instruction to "think of not thinking (*fushi*)", further clarifying this to mean that the practitioner should engage in "non-thinking" (*hishi*). While the philosophical underpinnings of this statement lie in the corpus of medieval Chinese and Japanese philosophy, the modern day

practitioner is left to their own devices for making sense of the contradiction of non-thinking. When pressed, the most common response is to invoke metaphor: one practitioner explained that he had been taught to think of the mind like an empty sky, with thoughts being like clouds. When clouds fill the sky, the result is a storm or a gloomy day. Non-thinking, he explained, is like the sky letting the wind blow so that clouds cannot gather. When I asked for clarification, he suggested asking a priest, who would be able to explain better than he could.

So I did. The priest I spoke with explained that thoughts, "are just the changing landscape of your mind, momentarily passing through. A person is like a container that contains these passing experiences. Non-thinking means just noticing your thoughts and letting them happen without involving yourself."

From a philosophical perspective, the zazen practitioners understood what they were being instructed to do. Doing so in practice, however, was a different story. Along with my fellow practitioners, I came to appreciate how frustrating *non-thinking* could be. Any distraction – footsteps in the hallway, a person coughing, an itch under your nose, a car driving up the driveway – could easily become the jumping-off point of a cascade of mental and emotional responses. The mind swims with random thoughts: bills to be paid, work that needs to be done, letters or e-mails to be written, food to be purchased for dinner, a catchy song, a phone call to make. By the time the practitioner realizes where their thoughts have taken them, how far from "non-thinking" they have traveled, minutes or even the entire period have passed. So much for "just sitting."

The very act of cognition becomes the white elephant in the room. The only advice available is frustrating in its simplicity: let the thoughts pass, and start again.

Every person I spoke with identifies with this struggle, and only a handful are willing to say that they have experienced even the briefest moment of *shikantaza*. "The moment you recognize that you're doing it," one person explained, "it's over. And then you spend the rest of the period wondering how you did it, and thinking how to do it again."

Through all of this is the shadow of the hall monitor brandishing his *kyōsaku*, quietly patrolling the hall behind the backs of the practitioners. While the unsui who are assigned to assist the Sanzenkai are more lenient than their counterparts who patrol the Monk's Hall, the constant presence of the hall monitor is a reminder of the bodily and mental discipline necessary for zazen.

The unsui keep time in an innovative manner: by watching the progression of a burning stick of incense. Similarly, regular zazen practice trains the body to mark the passage of time. Like students nearing the end of class, one begins to hear sounds of increased restlessness around the thirty-minute mark. When the incense has burned down to the sand, the monitor rings the bell twice to mark the start of *kinhin*. Slowly and gingerly, the practitioners unfold their legs, stand up, and stand at attention, their hands in *shashu* over their hearts.

Kinhin is a slow meditative walk that allows practitioners to stretch their legs without breaking the atmosphere of concentration in the hall. As would be expected, steps are deliberate, and movements precise: with each step, a person moves exactly half a footlength, as measured by placing the heel along the instep of the opposite foot. While the step is measured, the timing is not: it is common to see a logjam situation when a person decides to be more "meditative" than those behind him.

Kinhin is brief – no more than three minutes – and the bell is rung once to signal the practitioners to return to their seats. Hearing the bell, the practitioners bow in place, and then quickly follow masking taped arrows on the floor to cycle back to their cushions. When they get there, they get back on the platform, and turn around to continue their zazen for another period.

Teishō

After the second period of zazen, the bell is rung once to signal the end of the sitting. After dismounting from the platform, stepping into their slippers, repositioning their cushions, the group again stands at attention, their hands held in *shashu*. The group then processes single-file out of the hall and down Sōjiji's long corridor like a giant snake. The orderly procession of over fifty people requires following careful rules of traffic, and one of the most important lessons of moving in a monastery hall is learning who leaves first. The east side of the inner hall empties first, followed by the west side, and finally followed by those sitting in the outer hall.

Once in the long corridor, the unsui lead the group through the wooden halls from one side of the temple to the other. Walking briskly in ill-fitting slippers, the group thunders through the temple corridors. The movement of the group usually hiccups when passing through the central gate where one is obliged to bow towards the image of the Buddha in the Butsuden: some people give the Buddha a cursory bow, while others will give a deeper salute. The result is often that the back half of the line often needs to speed walk to catch up with the front. At times, the backup is so bad that someone will fail to

realize that this is not another instance of contemplative *kinhin*, and will be verbally urged to hurry up by the queue forming behind them.

The group winds its way through the temple to the Shiuntai, a large hall used for Sōjiji's abbot to formally receive visitors and guests. Though the hall is visibly impressive from the outside, the interior hallway is dimly lit, appearing to be just another corridor. Non-descript sliding doors flank the hallway, leading to two reception rooms on either side of the corridor. Arriving at the hall, the group takes off their slippers and lines them up in pairs along the wall.

One by one, the members of the Sanzenkai enter the room on the right side. The room's interior betrays the bland appearance from the hallway: the non-descript sliding doors are revealed to be a beautifully flowing painting of pine branches, masterpieces painted by artists from the illustrious Kanō family. The long room overlooks a meticulously maintained courtyard with a lake and stone lanterns. In a nook at the head of the room hangs a larger-than-life sized painting of Daruma (Skt. Bodhidharma), the Indian patriarch credited with bringing Zen to China. Daruma, immediately recognizable in his iconic red cloak amidst a ferocious storm, is a fitting image for this hall where the Sanzenkai will gather to listen to a *teishō* from one of Sōjiji's priests.

While both are glossed into English as a "sermon," a *teishō* is differentiated stylistically from the more general *hōwa* (literally, "Dharma talk"). A hallmark of the *teishō* is the use of a religious text to provide a structural framework for the speech. Since text will be written in classical Japanese or even classical Chinese with diacritical marks which few Japanese have the training to read, the speaker will go line-by-line through text, providing examples – occasionally drawn from his own life experiences – to

illuminate the meaning of the text for the audience. Often (but not always) the speaker will provide a photocopy of the text for the audience to follow along.

Another difference between the two "sermons" is the intended audience. Of the two, *hōwa* are generally more accessible to a lay audience, as they are more-or-less self-contained entities: even if the *hōwa* makes reference to a religious text, the assumption is that the audience will not be familiar with the reference, and therefore emphasis is placed on the overall message of the sermon.

In contrast, *teishō* are traditionally delivered to monastic audiences. In theory, the unsui hearing the *teishō* would have been familiar with the text, often having been assigned to study it independently. By emphasizing the text as the foundation for the speaker's interpretation, the *teishō* takes on the aura of "revealed wisdom" – indeed, part of the function of the *teishō* is to impart to fledgling clergy the knowledge of how a Sōtō Zen priest should publicly interpret religious texts.

The majority of the people I spoke with considered the *teishō* to be an important part of their weekly zazen practice. However, this is not a universal sentiment. One man explained to me that his opinion of the *teishō* changes week by week: "It really depends of the content. I think that the zazenkai *teishō* currently lacks in content and goes on for too long. It just gets in the way of our zazen." A handful of others echoed the sentiment that the topic and content of the *teishō* made all of the difference, and that an uninteresting sermon was wasting time that could be better spent sitting zazen.

Since people come to the Sanzenkai with a variety of motivations, it should not be surprising that there is no consensus about what is expected or desired from the *teishō*. One of the upshots of having the priests deliver sermons on a rotating basis is to enable

the practitioners to benefit from a variety of teaching styles and topics. By and large, the lecturers that are most liked are those who actively seek to engage their audience by lecturing on topics that are of interest to an educated layperson.

In my two years of field research, by far the most popular speaker was a priest recently returned from the United States after living for years in a small Zen community in New England, occasionally lecturing and holding zazen sessions at several local colleges. After his return to Japan, he had been invited by the head of the Fukyō-ryō to give sermons once a month to the Sanzenkai.

While being a dynamic speaker in his own right, his sermons were both practical and scientific, discussing the practice of zazen alongside various topics like psychology, kinesthesiology, and phenomenology. This kind of lecture was appealing to many Sanzenkai participants, who felt that by focusing on the practical he was giving them insight into the "real" Zen, unadulterated by the trappings of religion or sectarianism.

Other priests took a more traditional approach to their *teishō* by lecturing on Sōtō Zen religious texts like the *Shōbōgenzō Zuimonki*[5] or zazen manuals like the *Fukan Zazengi*. These lectures tended to be dryer and more abstract, since they were reliant on the speaker's interpretation of an often impenetrable classical text. However, these lectures appealed to those who were more interested in historical or philosophical aspects zazen: one participant told me that the opportunity to hear passages from religious texts "really left an impression" on her since the lecturer demonstrated how old words of wisdom are still true today.

Because the *teishō* is firmly couched in the cultural norms of a hierarchical master/disciple relationship, there is rarely any formal interaction between speaker and

[5] A distillation of essential passages from Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō*, as compiled by Dōgen's successor Ejō.

audience, and almost no opportunity for clarification or questioning during the *teishō* itself. One result of this that the speaker has the tendency to lose their audience through disengagement. While an attentive few will take notes while the teacher speaks, many will spend the session only half-listening and checking their watches. Others will spend the time by nodding off to sleep.

It was this desire for greater participation that lead to the creation of the *yonchukai,* the "fourth period group" that met after the official ending time of the Sanzenkai to open the floor to general discussion about zazen practice.[6] In addition, during my fieldwork, a separate *sanchukai* ("third period group") was started for first-time participants and new members to freely ask questions about their experiences of zazen.

Displacement

All of this, of course, necessitates the question: Why does the Sanzenkai receive a *teishō* if they are not being groomed as religious specialists? Revealing another aspect of the Sanzenkai's liminal status as "neither monk nor layman," part of the reason lies in the group's relationship to the Sōjiji administrative hierarchy. Until recently, the Sanzenkai was an extension of the Seibu, the "Western Side" of the training temple that oversees the seminary training of the unsui. Even today, the official bylaws (*kaisoku*) of the Sanzenkai list the actual head of the group as the priest holding the position of Godō-rōshi, with the assistant head being the Tantō-rōshi – the two priests responsible for the day-to-day

6 The character *chu* (炷) means "stick of incense." As explained above, the duration of a burning stick of incense marks a set period of time in a Zen temple. Therefore, *chu,* as used here, can be glossed as "period."

education of the unsui. Administratively speaking, therefore, the Sanzenkai was for many years less a lay organization than it was an offshoot of the monastic training program. As the unsui receive *teishō*, so does the Sanzenkai.

However, the Sanzenkai's favored status among temple groups was dramatically changed in 2002 when it was decided that the Sanzenkai, as a lay organization, was more appropriately placed under the auspices of the Fukyō-ryō. The logic was administrative: for one, the three priests of the Seibu already had their hands full with the training and teaching of over a hundred unsui; adding responsibility for the Sanzenkai was an extra administrative burden on offices already stretched too thin. For another, the Fukyō-ryō was already tasked with outreach programming and helping to raise lay interest and participation at Sōjiji. Since the Sanzenkai was already one of the most successful means for bringing people though Sōjiji's doors, it seemed like a natural fit to include the Sanzenkai as part of the temple's propagation efforts. The decision was made to remove the Sanzenkai from the seminary side and give responsibility to the administrative side. The Fukyō-ryō was formally renamed the "Zazen Fukyō-ryō" – the Zazen and Propagation Department.

For the Sanzenkai, this administrative reorganization was a humiliating demotion in status. Even now, members of the Sanzenkai remember the time before 2002 as "the golden age" of the group, when the members could fully imagine themselves as participating in the *shugyō* of the unsui. These participants fondly recalled the priests of the Seibu who would take the time to sit zazen with the group every week.

After the transition, many members of the Sanzenkai felt abandoned. Their confidence in their *shugyō* – which they believe allowed them to be "monks for a day"

(*ichinichi unsui*) – was shaken by thought that the temple administration now simply saw the Sanzenkai as just another form of lay participation. Several long-time practitioners left the group out of anger over this perceived insult.

Why would this administrative move have been so traumatic for the Sanzenkai? For years, the Sanzenkai had grown comfortable in their liminal status in the temple system. Their position as part of the Seibu distinguished the group from other temple organizations. Dedicated members might sometimes even gain special rights – for example, being allowed to sit zazen with the unsui in the Sōdō – that were unheard of for other groups.

With the change of hands, the Sanzenkai largely lost its special position. While the Godō-rōshi and Tantō-rōshi still participate in the group by giving *teishō* on a rotating basis, their responsibilities to the unsui largely keep these priests from giving the Sanzenkai the attention to which it had grown accustomed. Further, there were comparably fewer special privileges afforded to the Sanzenkai.

There may be another factor in play. The groups that had previously fallen under the auspices of the Fukyō-ryō – for example, the Fujinkai and the Baikakō – tended to be comprised primarily of women whose participation in the life of the temple centered around religious observations and ritual participation. Before the transfer to the Tōbu, the majority-male Sanzenkai could entertain the fantasy that since their practice was modeled on that of the unsui, they were more "authentic" than those groups whose *shugyō* had no scriptural precedent. After the move to the Tōbu, this conceit was no longer possible.

Perhaps the most significant factor might be that the Sanzenkai generally sees itself as both functionally and philosophically distinct from other lay organizations at

Sōjiji. Unlike groups such as the Fujinkai and the Baikakō, which serve a ritual role to Sōjiji through their participation in temple ceremonies, the Sanzenkai's role in Sōjiji's ritual life borders at times on the tangential. While the group will always accept the invitation to participate in a ceremony, there is a tacit sense among many members that such ritual obligations cut into precious zazen sitting time. Indeed, group attendance is generally reduced by more than a third when it is known in advance that the Sanzenkai would be invited to participate in a temple ceremony.

This is not to say that the members of the Sanzenkai are necessarily averse to religious obligations. Rather, it is that the Sanzenkai, by and large, hold a different conceptualization than either the clergy or other lay groups for what Zen should be: "pure" Zen is zazen, and nothing else.

Recalling the earlier discussion of motivation to practice zazen, it should be remembered that members of the Sanzenkai are *more* likely than their counterparts in other lay organizations to be familiar with the foundational writings of the Japanese Sōtō Zen patriarchs Dōgen and Keizan. A key argument of the zazen purists is that the trappings of institutionalized Buddhism – an emphasis on funeral and memorial rituals, complex ritual movements, arcane invocations, and ornate paraphernalia – are nowhere found in doctrinal texts. The often-repeated battle cry of this group is "The Buddha didn't perform funerals." What the Buddha *did* do is sit zazen.

This emphasis on zazen as the *sine qua non* of Buddhist practice is extended to the Sōtō Zen patriarchs. The most commonly cited reference is the "Bendōwa" fascicle from the *Shōbōgenzō*, in which Dōgen writes:

> From the very moment when a disciple comes to meet face-to-face with the one who is to be his spiritual friend and knowing teacher, there is no need to have the disciple offer incense, make prostrations, chant the names of the Buddhas, do ascetic practices and penances or recite Scriptures: the master just has the disciple do pure zazen until he lets his body and mind drop off.

Even Keizan, who is commonly vilified by purists for contaminating Dōgen's "pure" Zen by promoting funerals and memorial rites to bolster popular appeal, is used to support the purists' argument. Especially significant at Sōjiji, a line from Keizan's *Zazen Yōjinki* is used with the effect of a smoking gun: "Although grand Buddhist ceremonies or the building of large temples are very good things, people who devote themselves to zazen should not be involved in such activities."

What is commonly forgotten – or neglected – by the purists is the fact that both Dōgen and Keizan left behind far more than manuals for zazen. Both Sōtō Patriarchs wrote massive corpuses of written materials that not only included personal correspondence, sermons, and instructions to their disciples, but also detailed monastic Rules to govern and direct the performance of rituals and ceremonies in the monastery. However, as T. Griffith Foulk (2008) notes, these texts – especially the "Bendōwa" citation – have been used opportunistically and out of context throughout the twentieth century by apologists who have sought to redefine the identity of Sōtō Zen vis-à-vis a widening religious field in Japan. "The claims of twentieth-century Sōtō school scholars that Dōgen rejected the 'syncretic' aspects of Song Chan monastic practice and that he taught a form of 'pure' Zen that consisted of an exclusive devotion to seated meditation

are entirely groundless" (Foulk 2008: 42). Indeed, the idea of a "pure" form of Zen as transmitted through a fundamentalist reading of certain texts at the expense of others demonstrates not only a concern over legitimacy and authenticity within the Sōtō Zen sect itself, but also a desire to establish a well-defined sectarian identity distinct from all others schools of Buddhism. All sects of Japanese Buddhism have elaborate ritual, but through an emphasis on zazen, Zen apologists have sought to establish a practice that is unique to them, and consequently, uniquely "theirs."

That this insistence on the "purity" of zazen has become a sticking point for many in Sōjiji's Sanzenkai further demonstrates that the centuries-old sibling rivalry between Sōjiji and Eheiji is alive and well. The claim that "*sanzen* is *zazen*" takes on an added dimension of significance at Sōjiji. It is literally insulting Keizan in his own house: the purists' claim relies on the vilification of Sōjiji's founder and his lineage as charlatans who tainted the purity of Dōgen's Zen.

The blanket rejection of "all of this" – the lamentation over the primacy of funeral and memorial ritual, the clergy's focus on parishioners over religious "seekers", and even the training of the unsui to be ritual specialists – is a long-awaited coup for the Meiji-era Sōtō ideologues who fought to establish Eiheiji (and thus Dōgen) as historically, politically, and ideologically dominant over Sōjiji and Keizan. The claim for the purity of zazen is thus a tacit rejection of Sōjiji's role in cementing Sōtō Zen's place within the Japanese religious field for over six hundred years. A dish served cold, indeed.

♦♦

After the *teishō*, the group takes the noisy return trip through the temple, and back to the Shuryō. The Sanzenkai will sit one final session of zazen before the group breaks

for the day. When the sitting ends, the participants again process out from the hall to line up in front of the Shuryō. There, they stand at attention with their hands held in *shashu* to wait for instructions for *samu* – work detail.

While the group waits, several plastic buckets of cold water and cleaning rags are filled in the water closet at the end of the corridor. Another volunteer lays an armful of brooms on the floor in front of the group. The officers ask for volunteers to clean the bathrooms. Several members – usually the same week to week – determinedly step forward to volunteer for the task.

Despite the fact that the corridor in front of the Shuryō has already been cleaned twice that day alone, the corridor and every surface of the hall will be cleaned by the Sanzenkai, armed with brooms, rags and water. In a parallel to the unsui, who are tasked with the Sisyphean task of repeatedly cleaning a temple as immense as Sōjiji, the work of the Sanzenkai is intended to be an extension of the meditative practice of the previous three hours. The floors and surfaces are not cleaned because they are in need of cleaning; rather, they are cleaned because the work is another opportunity to discipline the body and mind towards a lasting state of "non-thinking".

This subtle point goes unspoken, and may in fact be missed by the majority of the Sanzenkai who are unfamiliar with the doctrinal underpinnings of the monastic *shugyō*. Instead of focusing on disciplined movement, the hall is cleaned with the speed and efficiency of fifty people doing common household chores. There is a rush to grab the brooms, but those who come up empty are relegated to washing the cold floors and wooden surfaces with increasingly dirty water and rags. Portions of the hall are divvied up so that each person has a piece of floor, or surface to clean. Gone is the contemplative

quiet of the previous three hours: the Shuryō is fully lit, with the participants rushing to get everything returned to order as quickly as possible.

After *samu*, the group lines up once more for announcements, and waits to be formally dismissed. When the announcements are over, the group quickly breaks apart and everyone goes their separate ways. Some members will linger around the temple precincts or the gift shop, but the majority will head directly for Tsurumi Station to catch a train home. Cell phones are turned on, and messages and e-mail are checked. The modern world returns with alarming velocity.

"Neither Monk nor Layman"

As much as the members of the Sanzenkai wish to imagine themselves to have one foot on either side of the gap that separates the lay and clerical communities of Sōjiji, there are substantial differences that distinguish their *shugyō* from those of the monastic communities.

Despite the fact that members of the Sanzenkai share the interest and the experience of zazen (both in varying degrees of intensity) with their fellow participants, there is remarkably little sense of camaraderie or community among the group in general. Individual practitioners often form friendships and associations with other practitioners within the group. However, it is seldom that a practitioner identifies with the Sanzenkai as a social unit to which they have an obligation to uphold, in the sense of being a player on a team or an employee in a company. This is in stark contrast not only to the monastic community but also to other lay organizations at Sōjiji, whose shared *shugyō* instills a

sense of "being in it together." The small cadre of volunteer officers (*sewanin*) are generally the exception to the rule, and it is they who will most often stand to represent the Sanzenkai at official temple functions.

Several factors likely contribute to this lack of a sense of community. The very nature of zazen practice guarantees that the Sanzenkai spends most of its time in self-imposed isolation in the guise of communal activity. The limited time window that the Sanzenkai meets each week does not allow for members to freely discuss or share their experiences with one another. Apart from gatherings to celebrate the end of the year (December), the new year (February) and a one-night zazen retreat (July), the Sanzenkai has no regular outings to socialize over food, drink, and conversation. A result is that the members of the Sanzenkai have few social ties that bind them to the group. Indeed, the wearing of nametags is repeatedly stressed by the officers, lest the group fall into complete anonymity.

Another difference in the lasting results of *shugyō* is related to the intended goal of the disciplining practice. Despite the superficial similarities between the Sanzenkai's schedule and the daily regimen of the unsui, the Sanzenkai are not being disciplined to become religious specialists. The constant pressure exerted upon the unsui is intended to mold his mind and body to conform to the social identity of a Sōtō Zen cleric. As much as they imagine themselves to be "unsui-for-a-day," the Sanzenkai is comprised of laypersons – businesspersons, teachers, civil servants, retirees, homemakers, and the unemployed – whose social identities are established on the fact that they are *not* religious specialists.

Still, many members of the Sanzenkai hold themselves to the same standard as the unsui, believing that *shugyō* can be distilled into four hours of time, once a week. For some, this can lead to unrealistic expectations. At one meeting, the priest giving the *teishō* decided to use his time to open the floor to questions. Towards the end of the period, an elderly gentleman raised his hand and stood up. He passionately described his dedication to zazen practice, claiming to have rarely missed a meeting of the Sanzenkai in over eleven years of practice. However, he was upset and frustrated that in those eleven years, he still didn't know whether or not he had accomplished anything. "Daruma-san practiced zazen for nine years and attained *satori*. I've practiced for eleven years, and I have nothing to show for it. What am I doing wrong?"

The priest's response was fully in line with the Sōtō Zen teaching that *shugyō* is a lifestyle. He explained that it is not enough to simply sit zazen: practitioners should strive to bring the disciplined meditativeness of zazen to all aspects of their lives. "When you're working at your desk, or cleaning your house, eating a meal, or going for a walk, you should do whatever you are doing as if it is zazen. *Shikantaza* means 'just sitting,' but you don't have to be sitting to do it."

The man's question and the priest's response hint at a gap in the way *satori* is portrayed in books, and the way it is taught and embodied by the Sōtō Zen clergy. The Sanzenkai might be the most well-read of all the lay groups on books pertaining to Zen, but this knowledge comes at a price. The stories of eminent Buddhist masters and modern accounts from contemporary authors often contain grand depictions of earth-shattering enlightenment moments, moments of sudden and powerful awakening to ancient wisdom. Those who are familiar with and are attracted by the majesty of these texts, as this

questioning gentleman likely was, face frustration and disillusionment as they strive to become enlightened beings.

Majestic descriptions of enlightenment overshadow the more humble, but no less beautiful, everyday enlightenment that Sōtō Zen teaches: that *satori* is not a single moment in time, but the ability to realize these moments of non-thinking for longer periods of time through a diligent lifelong dedication to *shugyō*. Sōtō Zen stresses that practitioners – their own clergy, but lay practitioners as well – must come to see *shugyō* as an immersion program, akin to learning a new language: one's body and mind become "fluent" in the kinesthetic vocabulary of discipline only through constant repetition. While teachers are quick to point out that any practice is preferable to none at all, the lesson is clear: compartmentalizing *shugyō* into four-hour blocks once a week simply will not produce lasting results.

This last point might be the most significant difference between the monks and zazen purists. Zazen purists who decry the emphasis on ritual performance in the modern Sōtō Zen school hold to a very different worldview than the clergy they purport to emulate: theirs is a worldview where *hotoke* – as enlightened beings – are made through zazen alone. While nearly all interviewees from the Sanzenkai believe that Shakyamuni is an enlightened being, just over a third are willing to say the same about the dead – a point in direct contrast with conventional Sōtō Zen doctrine.

As discussed in the previous chapters, the life of a priest – both in training and out of training – is to be a ritual specialist and a custodian of a temple. Zazen is an essential part of an unsui's time in *shugyō*, but it is only part. A priest must be able to socially function as a mediator between the living and the dead, able to perform the memorial

rituals necessary to successfully transition the dead from a dangerous spirit into a benevolent and enlightened ancestor.

To a purist, however, zazen in this life is the only avenue towards enlightenment. By focusing in on zazen as the be-all of Zen practice, the purists make the implicit claim that the path towards becoming a *hotoke* begins and ends on the sitting cushion. The dead do not get a "pass" merely because they happened to die, and priests who spend their lives ministering to the dead are wasting years that could be spent in zazen.

To Die in Zazen

Perhaps the closest any layperson will come to living the daily regimen of the Sōtō Zen clergy without taking the "plunge" are the twice-yearly *sesshin*, week-long periods devoted to long and intense zazen practice. Over the course of a *sesshin* day, the unsui will sit for seven hours In other temples across Japan, *sesshin* are held more regularly – sometimes monthly – or more intensely – the monks at Eiheiji are cloistered in the Sōdō for the entire week. However, Sōjiji's schedule is uniquely tailored for its needs, and allowing for the basic functions of the temple to be maintained.

The laity, and in particular the Sanzenkai, are invited to sit the *sesshin* with the unsui. In previous times, the entirety of the Sanzenkai was invited to participate, sitting and taking their meals in the Shuryō while the monks sat in the Sōdō. In those days, more than fifty lay practitioners would regularly participate in the *sesshin*. Today, only about eighteen lay participants have the opportunity to join, and this is on a first-come basis.

The same lay practitioners tended to participate in the *sesshin*, often submitting their names to the list as early as possible. While many of the participants were retirees, others would use their yearly vacation time from work specifically to sit the *sesshin*, looking forward to it as one might a trip to a spa. When I asked one member from the Sanzenkai if he intended to sit the *sesshin* again, he regretfully told me that, "I can't do it this year. Because of work, I don't have time for play."

Play? The *sesshin* schedule runs from a 2:30 wake-up in the morning to 9 at night. In the course of a day, participants will sit for seven hours of zazen, a grueling marathon interspersed by meals (taken in the Sōdō while maintaining one's sitting and posture) and two *teishō* per day on esoteric religious texts. The *sesshin* are marked by exhaustion, sleep-deprivation, and the extremes of seasonal temperature – bitter cold in December and balmy heat in June. Sickness easily takes hold in this environment, and by mid-week, the Sōdō sounds like an infirmary. As Buswell (1993) describes of *sesshin* (Kor: *chŏngjin*) practice in Korean Son monasteries, the period is not intended to be sadistic or tortuous. Rather, the *sesshin* provides an "incredibly intense, but still carefully controlled environment" (188). Invoking the paradigm of the Buddha himself, whose intense period of sitting culminated in his enlightenment, the message of the *sesshin* is clear: achieve enlightenment, or die trying. It is not surprising that the *sesshin* is colloquially referred to as the "monk killer."

One of the most consistent lay participants in the *sesshin* is Mr. Sakagami, a quiet man in his eighties who wears an old black hakama, frayed at the ends. I had seen him at the Sanzenkai, where he always occupied the same seat in the Shuryō: the center cushion of the middle island towards the rear of the eastern side of the hall. I began paying

attention to him at the *sesshin*, when I saw him carry a well-beaten *zafu* cushion when he left the Sōdō. This was "his" cushion, borrowed from "his" seat in the Shuryō. He brought it back with him to the communal room in the Sanshōkan where the male lay participants were staying.

During a *sesshin*, downtime is precious. The exhaustion incurred by only getting four hours of sleep at most at night make any time spent in the guest room "nap time." Because the sleeping mattresses are stowed for the day, the participants lay sprawled out on whatever piece of floor they can claim. To an observer, it might look as if there was a gas leak in the room. Occasionally, two or three people would sit around the wooden table in the center of the room, drinking green tea and talking. Membership among the tea-drinkers was brief, as nearly everyone succumbed to the need to sleep eventually.

Through it all, Mr. Sakagami would be absent from the room. He could be found outside the room, sitting on his cushion, sitting in zazen. In the four *sesshin* that I participated in at Sōjiji, I only once had the occasion to speak to him – the one time that he decided to take tea before getting back to his sitting

He told me that he has been sitting zazen for over fifty years. He was first introduced to zazen by the company he worked for during the 1950s, as a means to cultivate concentration and morale. He remembers starting out by practicing zazen at a temple belonging to the Rinzai Zen sect whose zazen he dismissed as "strange". As he told me this story, one of the other participants jumped in to correct him: "You mean to say it is different, not strange." Mr. Sakagami turned to other man, and stuck to his guns: "It's strange. I didn't like it." I never was able to get out of him what he found so strange about it. He abruptly finished his tea, took his cushion, and left the room.

Many of the long-time practitioners knew him from years of sitting in the same hall every Sunday afternoon, though no-one was willing to say that they knew him well. They told me that he had always idolized the training monks, but never saw a need to take tonsure himself. He had worked until retirement, and after that had decided to spend every moment he could in zazen. He was on familiar terms with Itabashi-zenji, the former abbot of Sōjiji, who held up Mr. Sakagami as a paragon of lay practice.

In the biographies of eminent Zen masters, an ideal death is one in which the dying knows the end is approaching, composes a last verse, and musters the strength to die sitting in the zazen posture, facing death in meditative concentration. When death comes, it is not a cause for mourning: the last distractions to a state of perpetual enlightenment – the body and mind – have finally been sloughed off. In death, the master attains his final reward for a life lived in *shugyō*.

This is the death that Mr. Sakagami was hoping for, they told me. Both at home and at the *sesshin*, he practiced zazen tirelessly, long after younger or more fit men had succumbed to exhaustion. During my last *sesshin* at Sōjiji, Mr. Sakagami had developed a hacking cough that I was sure was going to be the end of him.

When last I visited Japan, I saw Mr. Sakagami with the Sanzenkai. He was sitting on his cushion in his seat in the Shuryō, oblivious to my presence. As I passed behind his back, I smiled. Mr. Sakagami was very much alive and well. He had not yet gotten his wish, but toiled on still, struggling to let go of the clouds and leave them to pass through the open sky.

Chapter 5

Baika

"Something for Old Ladies"

I was writing in my notebook when Mr. Yabata called from across the coffee table to ask me if I had ever heard *goeika* before. I was furiously trying to write down as much of the *sesshin* experience as I could before sheer exhaustion wiped it from my mind. I had quickly learned to pay attention to the sound of Mr. Yabata's voice: he was a veteran of over thirty years of Zen practice, nineteen *sesshin* and more pilgrimages to temples across Japan than he could count. For the previous four days, nearly all of the interesting conversation seemed to center around his seat at the large coffee table that took up most of the room. Moreover, since I was seated next to him in the Monk's Hall, he took it upon himself to correct my mistakes, such as helping me find my place in the chants or to explain subtleties that he thought I may have missed. My attention sprang from my notes to his face in the manner of a student who has been called on after falling asleep in class.

"*Goeika*. Have you ever heard *goeika*?," he asked again. I mentally searched for a referent to connect with the word, but came up with nothing. Should I have?

He pointed to my satchel and tells me to take out my audio recorder. "*Goeika* is like a hymn you hear in a church," he said. He quickly found a page near the back of my sutra book and showed it to me. "The songs are very old," he told me. "Probably three, four hundred years. I sing them when I make pilgrimages to temples." I looked at the book: there was no musical notation, nor any indication that the words printed on the page are music. I asked how he learned the songs. He said that he's known the melodies from his childhood, when his grandmother used to sing to him.

I placed my recorder on the table in front of him and I nod to indicate that we are recording. Mr. Yabata closed his eyes and began to sing in a voice that was at once tremulous with age and the style of Japanese traditional singing. One by one, the others in the room, who moments before were trying to steal as much sleep as they could between the periods of zazen, sat up to listen to the song.

I will never know what the others were thinking while they listened to Mr. Yabata sing. For a full fifteen minutes, not a word was spoken in the room. Mr. Yabata performed three songs for us, one song blending into the next with neither introduction nor explanation. When he finished, he looked up and simply said, "Like that."

In the weeks that followed Mr. Yabata's performance, I tried to find out more about the role of *goeika* at Sōjiji. Why hadn't I heard it before? An acquaintance from the Sanzenkai told me that the *goeika* group at the temple was known as the Baikakō. When I mentioned that *goeika* was something I'd like to try, he laughed. The Baikakō, he said, is "something for old ladies" (*obaachan no tame no mono*). Men were permitted, but it just wasn't something that was ordinarily done.

Despite the warning, it was immediately clear to me that the Baikakō was something I needed to know more about if I was going to paint a full picture of the Sōjiji community. The problem was that, despite six months of fieldwork and having observed nearly every scheduled public ceremony during that time, I had never seen – or heard of – the Baikakō. Unlike the Sanzenkai, which was prominently featured on Sōjiji's Internet homepage, the Baikakō was virtually invisible unless one knew exactly what to look for.

Even once found, the word "Baikakō" was meaningless to the average Japanese. Take, for example, the single-page monthly bulletin found at the signboard at the front entrance of Sōjiji. Under the heading of Baikakō is the following vague description: "Three times a month, the *kō* members invite you to practice with them. You can also give it a try for a day. If you are interested, please feel free to call." This description differs from the other listings on the page in that no indication is given of what the Baikakō actually does: the Sunday zazen group and the monthly public sermon are both more or less self-explanatory, and the Fujinkai clarifies that members "participate in a memorial service and a sermon, in addition to volunteer activities." When I finally happened by chance upon the Baikakō's monthly rehearsal schedule, the only indication that I had found what I was looking for was the inclusion of the word *goeika* in parentheses. Nowhere was there any indication of rehearsal time or location. I began to suspect that the Baikakō either did not want to be found, or were interested in being found only by those already "in the know."

If finding the Baikakō was difficult, even less obvious was how a twenty-something, non-Japanese male with no *goeika* experience could join a group of "goeika grandmothers" as a participating member or even simply observe a rehearsal without

being obtrusive. The Sanzenkai is accustomed to non-Japanese visitors, but to the best knowledge of my informants, a non-Japanese had never participated in Sōjiji's Baikakō in any capacity. I considered asking for an introduction from the monks of the Fukyō-ryō, but I had been cautioned that such an entree might come across as too "official", relegating me to a permanent outsider status in the group. Similarly, I knew that I could not just show up to a rehearsal unannounced and expect a warm welcome. Clearly the time and place of the rehearsal was protected information, and I knew from experience that trying to shoehorn myself into a social situation without proper introduction could result in a polite, but firm rejection that might close the door to any future interaction. Carefully considering my options, I calculated that my best course of action was to approach a woman I had met at the Sanzenkai who I had heard was a member of the Baikakō, in the hope that she might be willing to make an introduction on my behalf. This plan, unfortunately, never materialized: as if on cue, she stopped coming to the weekly Sanzenkai meetings after starting a new job.

As fortune would have it, the Baikakō approached *me* first. One Sunday in January, Mr. Takeuchi stopped me in the hall after a period of zazen to ask if I was interested in sitting in on a Baikakō rehearsal. He had heard (it was never clear to me from whom) that I had been asking around about *goeika*, and thought that experiencing the Baikakō might help me learn more about Sōjiji. I started to ask if he thought it would be okay; his response was that he had already spoken with the group leader for her permission for me to sit in as an observer. She had agreed, and the group was expecting me at the next rehearsal. I was grateful for both the invitation and the serendipity that led to it, and I agreed to meet him outside Sōjiji at ten the following Tuesday morning.

When I arrived at the temple that Tuesday morning, I saw that I had a phone message from Mr. Takeuchi. He was calling me to let me know that he would be late to rehearsal, and that I should just go in without him. After taking off my shoes in the entrance hall, I nervously made my way through the creaking temple corridors. It was only when I passed a sign which informed wayward visitors that they were not permitted past this point that I realized that I was further into the temple than I had ever gone without an escort.

I reached the rehearsal room without incident, but I nevertheless hesitated at the sliding door for a moment. Inside, I heard the sound of women's voices and the slight tinkling of bells. Gathering my courage, I opened the door, bowed in gasshō and apologized for my intrusion. Rehearsal was just about to begin, and the Baikakō members were taking their places around the room. As I entered, I was quickly greeted by the two women seated closest to the door. "Are you the observer?" one asked. I responded that I was, and they led me to an empty seat on the left side of the room, closest to where the teacher would be sitting. Taking my seat, I smiled and gave a slight bow to the woman sitting to my right, who returned the same.

The Sōtō Zen *Goeika* School

The Honzan Baikakō is one of many *kō* – religious associations or consociations – which are affiliated with Sōjiji. For centuries, the organization of *kō* has been a means of social cooperation in Japan. *Kō* bring together individuals for a common purpose, often to raise money to meet a financial need, but just as often to enjoy a shared hobby or interest,

or simply to socialize (Embree 1939). Temple-affiliated *kō* are a later development of this custom, implemented as a way to encourage lay participation in religious activities while serving as a means for the temple to generate income outside of the usual means of funerals and memorial ceremonies. Today, the suffix *kō* retains this nuance of "religious" and in common usage, *kō* most often refers to a lay religious association affiliated with a temple or shrine.

Like the *kō* of smaller temples throughout Japan, the membership of Sōjiji's various *kō* are drawn largely from the parishioner families of the temple, though membership is often extended to parishioners of other Sōtō temples. In this regard, Sōjiji is more fortunate than most, with more than five thousand parishioner families from which to draw. While nominally religious associations, many *kō* have the informal character of a university club or circle – one monastic informant went so far as to refer to the temple's *kō* as "teams". Consequently, the degree to which a given *kō* participates in temple-sponsored ceremonies and activities depends greatly upon the particular set of interests of its members. Some *kō* do meet semi-regularly at Sōjiji to hear sermons, take part in ceremonies, or participate in zazen or sutra-copying. Other *kō* never meet at Sōjiji at all, choosing instead to schedule outings to "fun" places such as hot springs, ski resorts, and Tokyo Disneyland.

According to the official history, the idea for a sect-wide Sōtō Zen *goeika-kō* is credited to Niwa Butsuan (d. 1955), abbot of Dōtōin in Shizuoka and former prior of Eiheiji. Niwa first proposed the creation of a Sōtō Zen *goeika* group in 1950 to be included as part of the celebrations surrounding the seven-hundredth anniversary of Dōgen's death to be held at Eiheiji. Niwa's interest in *goeika* as an instrument of

propagation was inspired by the successes of Shingon Buddhism which, since 1926, had been using *goeika* as a means to garner interest and participation among lay adherents. With the backing of many influential clergy in the Sōtō hierarchy, Niwa made repeated appeals to the sect's central office calling for the establishment of a school (*ryū*) of Sōtō *goeika* (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 2008: 401).

By 1951, the *goeika* movement based out of Niwa's small temple in Shizuoka had begun to generate momentum within the sect. Increasing support among the clergy and Niwa's many petitions to the Sōtō central office were eventually met with success, and the as-yet unnamed *goeika* school was officially established as an auxiliary organization of the Sōtō Zen sect in June of 1951. In October, representatives from the Sōtō Zen sect met with teachers from the *goeika* schools of three Shingon sects (Koyasan, Tōji and Chisan) and the Myōshinji Rinzai Zen sect to evaluate which existing style and practice would be "most compatible with the character of the Sōtō sect" (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 2008: 404). In the end, the Sōtō representatives decided that Sōtō *goeika* practice would be modeled after that of the Mitsugen-ryū of the Chisan Shingon sect.

On December 10, 1951, a meeting of the "Music Research Committee" convened to formally establish the new Sōtō Zen *goeika* school. Chief among their concerns was what to name the sect's nascent *goeika-kō*. Many possibilities were considered, but most were dismissed because they were not used in the writings of either of the sect's founders, and therefore had no "meaning" (Sōtōshū Shūmuchō 2008: 404). Ultimately, the Committee decided on the word *baika* ("plum blossom"), which is found in both Dōgen's *Shōbōgenzō* and in Keizan's *Denkōroku*. The Sōtō Zen sect's *goeika* organization, the

Committee decided, would henceforth be known as the Baika-ryū – the "Plum Blossom School."[1]

The significance of the plum blossom runs deep in the cultures of East Asia, as well as in Buddhist iconography and Sōtō Zen doctrine. Native to mainland China, the plum tree was long ago transplanted to the Vietnamese and Korean peninsulas and to the Japanese archipelago. In each of these countries, the life-cycle of the plum tree serves as an important measure of the passing of the year. The appearance of the plum blossoms in early February mark the coming of spring and correspond with the celebration of the Lunar New Year. Moreover, the fruiting of the plum trees in late May and early June correspond to the rainy season (*tsuyu*: literally, "plum rain"). As a consequence, the plum tree, its blossom and its fruit can be seen in the literary and visual arts throughout East Asia as symbols of continuity and renewal. Moreover, as the plum tree blooms amidst the backdrop of the biting cold and snows of early February, the plum blossom is often used to represent endurance in the face of great hardship.

This imagery was taken up in the Buddhist arts, in which the blooming plum tree is used like the lotus as a botanical representation of the awakened Buddha, whose presence in the world stands as a confident and defiant beacon of hope and beauty for those who live in the midst of great hardship and suffering. The Buddha's enlightenment, like the blooming of the plum tree, is not a singular event; rather, it is part of the natural cycle, no more mutable than the rising of the sun or the phases of the moon.

For the Buddhist clergy throughout East Asia, the plum blossom carries additional metaphorical significance. The early-blooming plum blossom thrives in times and places

[1] *Baika* 梅花 has no etymological relation to *goeika* 御詠歌 and the two are never used synonymously (cf. Arai 1999).

where other flowers cannot. They are a living reminder to monks-in-training that, like the Buddha, the monastic community exists as living examples of disciplined grace in spite of the demands and austerities of monastic life. Further, the blooming plum trees were tangible proof that the worst of the winter retreat had passed. As a consequence, the *baika* was the favorite flower of many in the Buddhist clergy, featuring prominently in the painting and verse composed by monks and nuns.

For the Japanese Sōtō Zen sect in particular, the image of a single branch of plum blossoms (*baika isshi*) has considerable significance as a symbol of the unbroken lineage of Zen patriarchs and uninterrupted transmission of the True Dharma realized by the Buddha. According to hagiographical accounts in the *Kenzei ki* and *Denkōroku*, Dōgen was once offered a cloth "transmission document" embroidered with a pattern of plum blossoms by a Chinese priest who believed that his chance meeting with Dōgen was foretold in a dream (Faure 1991: 119). The Chinese priest explained to Dōgen that the woven document contained the "instructions of the Buddhas and Patriarchs for teaching the Dharma" (*Denkōroku* 270). Although Dōgen politely refused the document, he would encounter the image of the plum blossom again: one morning, while sitting zazen at Daibai-zan (Ch. Damei-shan, literally "Mountain of the Great Plum Trees"), Dōgen had a vision of the long-dead Zen master Damei Fachang. In the vision, Damei handed Dōgen a single branch of plum blossoms. In an instant, Dōgen's eyes were opened and he participated in the great insight of the Buddhas and the Patriarchs. Dōgen's vision of having received the plum blossom spray from master Damei was a botanical "passing of the torch" which Dōgen used to legitimate his claim of being heir to the True Dharma which he brought to Japan from China.

The choice of the plum blossom – a symbol which encapsulated beauty, resilience, and the flourishing of Sōtō Zen tradition – may have been more auspicious than its coiners could imagine. More than half a century after its establishment, the Baika-ryū is the single largest official propagation organ in the Sōtō Zen sect, with more than 6,400 individual *kō* and over 170,000 registered members (Sōtō Shūmuchō 2008: 3)[2]. A clear measure of the success of *goeika* as a means of encouraging lay participation can be seen in the fact that the number of Baikakō groups sponsored by Sōtō Zen temples in Japan outnumbers zazen groups by a significant margin. According to official estimates, only one in ten Sōtō temples hold regular zazenkai, compared to the one in three temples which sponsor regular Baikakō rehearsals.

"Women's *Shugyō*"

At Sōjiji, the Baikakō falls under the auspices of the temple's Fukyō-ryō (Propagation Department). The Fukyō-ryō handles many of the logistical arrangements for the Baikakō, for example, scheduling rehearsal space and arranging for new *goeika* teachers. In addition, the Fukyō-ryō serves as a liaison between the Sōjiji Baikakō and the sect-level offices of the Baika-ryū. New *kō* members are registered with the Fukyō-ryō, who in turn, put in the appropriate paperwork to the central Baika-ryū offices. Similarly, when *kō* members take the official advancement tests through the Baika-ryū, they will hear the results from the head of the Fukyō-ryō, who will recognize the successful candidate with a certificate of advancement.

[2] Virtually all members are Japanese living in Japan. However, there are three international *kō* affiliated with Sōtō international missions in Maui, Los Angeles and Sao Paulo.

Aside from this logistical assistance from the Fukyō-ryō, the Baikakō itself is mostly autonomous. The group receives no financial assistance from Sōjiji for any of its activities. Rather, the group collects monthly dues of 2,500 yen from each member. Two-thirds of dues collected are given to the temple to cover operational costs associated with rehearsals, including the teacher's salary and a donation in gratitude for the use of temple space. The other one-third is kept by the group to pay for incidentals such as tea and sweets for each rehearsal, as well as occasional expenses such as donations and gifts made in the group's name.

The Baikakō has three officers: a group leader (*kōchō*), an assistant group leader and a secretary. These officers are elected by the group membership. The primary role of the officers is to serve as representatives to the temple on behalf of the Baikakō. The leader in 2007 was Mrs. Sakamoto, a soft-spoken octogenarian who had the prestige of being the longest-participating member of the group. While she rarely addressed the group directly, her opinion was most often solicited when issues of group policy or procedure arise. As the longest-participating member of Sōjiji's Baikakō, Mrs. Sakamoto was often the only one able to give insight into the origins and rationale of policy decisions that have since become group tradition. The assistant leader was a jovial man named Mr. Kubota, a longtime friend of Mrs. Sakamoto. They had both come to Tokyo in the early 1960s from Miyagi Prefecture, and he was elected to the assistant position because a conflict or disagreement between the two of them was virtually unthinkable.

In terms of actual authority in the group, the leader and the assistant leader are largely figurehead positions. Either by role or by force of personality, the *de facto* authority in the group lies in the position of secretary. This office was held by Mrs.

Terasawa, a fiery woman in her mid-seventies, who was in charge of the membership roster and responsible for collecting the monthly dues and monitoring the group's finances. Mrs. Terasawa was surprisingly computer savvy and within a short time of her taking on the mantle of secretary, she thoroughly modernized the group's recordkeeping through her use of computer spreadsheets and digital recording.

The force of Mrs. Terasawa's personality was immense. While she would often appear to defer to the higher ranking *kōchō*, she was widely regarded as both policy-maker and enforcer. In contrast to Mrs. Sakamoto's soft-spoken demeanor, Mrs. Terasawa's *shitamachi* ("downtown") upbringing, of which she was very proud, gave her a predisposition towards directness and bluntness in her speech and mannerisms. She would bring the full force of her personality to bear when it came to what she thought was best for the group. Even the teacher knew better than to engage her in open disagreement.

Including the three officers, the Honzan Baikakō has an official membership of thirty-five members, though only twenty-five or so attend any given rehearsal. As long as they pay their monthly dues, members are free to attend or not as they please. Most are diligent in coming to rehearsal as often as they can, but illness, family obligations and travel plans are the reasons most often given for not being able to make it to a specific rehearsal. Members have no need to explain or excuse their absence to the officers or the group – I simply asked after their well-being when I noticed that someone was not at a previous rehearsal.

One of the most notable features of the Sōtō Baika-ryū movement, and of *goeika* groups generally, is the overwhelming predominance of elderly women among the

participants. Of the thirty-five members of Sōjiji's Baikakō, female members outnumber the men by nearly a ten to one margin, with only four men included on the roster. Prior to 2001, the group was exclusively female; even after, there have never been more than five men in the group at any one time. These numbers are not uncommon in other temples' Baikakō; if anything, Sōjiji may be exceptional in having so *many* men willing to participate.

It is interesting to note that there is nothing inherently gendered or "feminine" about *goeika* or its performance. The history of *goeika* in Japan dates back to at least the middle Heian Period, around the eleventh century CE. *Goeika* has long been associated with the devotional practices of the laity, most notably temple pilgrimages. As pilgrimage songs, *goeika* were taught and sung by men and women alike. It was only after *goeika* was adopted by the various sects of Japanese Buddhism as a means of propagation in the middle of the last century that *goeika* took on a reputation for being almost exclusively "women's *shugyō*".

The reasons behind this development are not entirely clear. One male informant suggested half-jokingly that women are more suited to *goeika* because their voices are "prettier and easier to listen to" than men's voices. Another long-time Baikakō member (a woman) told me that women prefer the Baikakō to things like zazen because the "environment isn't as strict". I suggest that one possibility for the gendering of *goeika* may rest in the fact that modern *goeika* is perceived to be an accessory – in the sense of an ornamentation or a support – in Sōtō Zen temple life and therefore subordinate to "established" practices such as sutra chanting and zazen. While *goeika* may be a touching addition to a funeral or memorial service, it cannot take the place of the necessary ritual

liturgy that give the ritual its soteriological efficacy. These are sole purview of the ordained – and nearly always male – clergy.

In this regard, it is not coincidental that the model *goeika* practitioner is personified not in a priest, but rather in the temple wife (*jizoku*). As wives of clergy, *jizoku* are expected to be exemplars of Japanese traditional "womanly" virtues, which include "patience, diligence, endurance, even-temperedness, compliance, and a positive attitude" (Lock 1988: 46). Temple wives are an essential part of the day-to-day life of a small temple, working as housekeeper, gardener, cook, bookkeeper, receptionist and, perhaps most importantly, mother to the temple's heir. Yet, for all of their efforts, temple wives remain effectively marginal to the Buddhist institution: they are essential for its survival into future generations, but ultimately unqualified to provide care or services to parishioners or their ancestors (Kawahashi 1995; 2003).

As we saw in the previous chapter, there are many who hold the view that activities which allow lay practitioners to participate in the "traditional" monastic *shugyō*, however briefly, are superior to those activities which are defined as "modern" inventions or are "lay-oriented." It is not enough that *goeika* predates the advent of Zen in Japan by almost two hundred years, nor does the fact that many male clergy are themselves accomplished *goeika* practitioners sway their opinion. Rather, the Baikakō's origins as a lay propagation movement and an activity suitable for "grandmothers" and "temple wives," as well as the relatively recent inclusion of *goeika* as part of the Sōtō Zen liturgical repertoire contribute to an atmosphere in which *goeika* is perceived as being ancillary to – and less authentic than – other temple practices. In the eyes of many Zen fundamentalists, *goeika* – like women – operates within a limited sphere in a Buddhist

temple. As a consequence, *goeika* does not appeal to many who voice a preference for what they believe to be more "pure" *shugyō* like zazen.

Those men who would otherwise be attracted to *goeika* might also be dissuaded from joining by the Baikakō's reputation for being a "women's group". It should not be surprising that there are many women in the Baikakō who have a vested interest in keeping that reputation intact. Mr. Takeuchi told me that when he joined the Baikakō, several women were less than welcoming, treating him coldly in his presence, and openly complaining about him in his absence. According to Mr. Takeuchi, these women resented his invasion into what they considered to be "their" space. He was not the first man to join the Baikakō (Mr. Kubota had this honor), but the women clearly felt that one man was more than enough. Mr. Takeuchi would later tell me that he persisted in the group, but never felt truly included in it.

The age of the Sōjiji Baikakō members range from fifty-nine to eighty-six, with a mean age of 71.8 years. Most of the current members were in their early sixties when they joined the group. Far from being a mere statistic, the advanced age of the Baikakō members has much to say about the place that *kō* participation holds in members' lives. According to Japanese custom, sixty is the age in which a person's life comes full circle, returning them to a 'childlike' state in which familial obligations and social responsibilities are formally passed to their children. Not coincidentally, sixty is also the age of mandatory retirement in Japan. Rather than celebration, many Japanese enter their sixties with a sense of trepidation and resentment, feeling that they have lost – or, perhaps more accurately, been forced out of – the social identities that have defined them for the entirety of their adult lives. Far from being a period of carefree living, sixty is often a

difficult time that is characterized by a loss of purpose and a struggle to redefine oneself after a lifetime spent in the workplace or home, occupations which provided clear coordinates by which one could plot their place in the social world (see White 2002: 154-164).

As the time when one's parents pass away and one's children have children of their own[3], one's sixth decade also marks a major transitional point in a person's life as they assume new roles in their families as elders and custodians of family traditions. Further, the obligations of funerals, memorial ceremonies and the rites of ancestor veneration bring many to encounter – often for the first time – their family's religious affiliations. These new responsibilities are often accompanied by increased awareness of one's own mortality and concern regarding what lies in store after death.

Though some retirees have long-standing interests that they can now look forward to spending more time with, many who have had precious little free time during their working lives are forced to face the fact that time – empty and undisciplined – is now all they have. For those without previous interests or hobbies, the early sixties is often a time for trying out new and different activities on an experimental basis, searching for something to which they can devote their time and attention and from which they can forge a new social identity to sustain them through their autumn years. The range of possibilities is, of course, infinite. For many, the organized structure and discipline of the traditional arts provide a culturally meaningful context for a Japanese to reestablish familiar patterns in their daily lives and reinvent themselves in a navigable social landscape.

[3] According to the 2007 Statistical Handbook of Japan, the average life expectancy is 82.41 years (85.81 years for women, 79.00 years for men). The mean bearing age of a first child is 29.4 years. (www.stat.go.jp/english/data/handbook/c02cont.htm, accessed June 29, 2009)

This is not to say that women and men below the retirement age cannot join the Baikakō. However, at least at Sōjiji, the rehearsal schedule consisting of a five-hour block on weekdays three times a month does not lend itself to the schedules of those with regular employment or with child-care responsibilities. Even if there was interest in singing *goeika* – a rare enough thing given the popularity and accessibility of things like karaoke – the situation is that people who have jobs and families simply do not have the free time required to be dedicated members. There are exceptions, of course: the Baikakō is considered an excellent way for temple wives, many of whom are between the ages of thirty and sixty, to actively participate in religious activities. The only other exception to the "*goeika* granny (or grandpa)" stereotype I encountered in the Baikakō was an unmarried woman in her late thirties who worked part time. As expected, she had no choice but to quit the Baikakō when she found full-time employment.

As members age, participation in the Baikakō plays an increasingly significant role in their lives. Over the course of their years of practice, they will come to invest hundreds and eventually thousands of hours of face-to-face rehearsal time with the group. In contrast to the Sanzenkai, members often form close bonds of friendship with other participants. This is especially true if they joined the group around the same time.

Participation in the Baikakō is most dedicated during one's seventies, as members who began in their sixties reach veteran status in the group and the prestige of being counted among the higher ranks in the sect-wide organization. This is also the time in which members' interest in Buddhism begins to flourish: travel, especially religious tourism (to temples and pilgrimage sites) is exceedingly common. Some members report

branching out to other aspects of religious life at Sōjiji such as monthly sermons, sutra copying, or zazen, though regular participation in these activities is rare.

By the time a member reaches eighty, however, participation tends to fall off dramatically as infirmity and illness make attending rehearsals increasingly difficult. By the time a member stops attending rehearsals – most often as a consequence of illness or death – they will have had, on average, between ten and twenty years of experience with the group.

As of this writing, there are only three regularly participating members over the age of eighty. All of them are women, and all of them are widows. For these women, their participation in the Baikakō is all that is left for them: time has taken spouses, friends, and in at least one case, children, and these elderly members seldom leave their homes for anything except a Baikakō rehearsal. "Younger" members (themselves in their late-sixties to early-seventies) speak of these "elders" with respect, but use hushed tones to lament what they see as a lonely, sad life as a "shut-in." While these widows may be pitied by other members, they can at least be comforted in the knowledge that when they too pass away, their funeral will be well-attended by the surviving members and clergy of Sōjiji in honor of their many years of dedication to the Honzan Baikakō.

The Hall of the Smiling Clouds

For years, the Baikakō has used a multi-purpose room known as the Shōunkaku ("Hall of the Smiling Clouds") for rehearsals. The room sits adjacent to the Fukyō-ryō offices in an area that ranks among the least-trafficked areas of Sōjiji. To reach it from

the temple reception desk, one has to navigate a twisting path along the temple corridors through three separate buildings, past a barricade with a posted sign stating "No visitors beyond this point", and finally up a steep carpeted incline. For a person unfamiliar with the layout of Sōjiji, the room – tucked away in the deepest part of the temple – is virtually impossible to find without assistance.

The building sits on the highest point of the temple grounds and commands an impressive view over the entire temple precincts. The room used for rehearsal is a simple rectangle, narrow on the eastern and western ends and long on the northern and southern sides. Translucent paper panels separate the western and southern walls from the hallway outside, while opaque sliding doors close off the eastern and northern walls from the rooms behind. While these panels create a space of relative privacy, one is always aware of the activity going on in other rooms of the building, especially the busy Fukyō-ryō office next door whose phone and fax machines are perpetually ringing.

Without furniture, the Shōunkaku is an empty visual space which virtually begs to be defined. For lectures, the room's spacious tatami flooring can easily accommodate about eighty people. When "study and training" (*kenshū*) retreat groups come to Sōjiji, low tables are brought into the room so that the guests have space to take notes, copy sutra, and eat. On overnight stays, bedding is brought in from a nearby storage closet to convert the room into sleeping quarters. For zazen sessions, *zafu* cushions can be placed around the perimeter of the room to create an impromptu zazen hall. The only fixed pieces of furniture in the room are two small bookshelves off to the side which contain an eclectic variety of Buddhism-related reading material.

The room, as it is, can easily be converted for ritual purposes. In an alcove along the northern wall hangs a scroll painting of the bodhisattva Kannon, beneath which sits a basic altar holding candlesticks, an offering of fresh flowers and an incense burner. A *kyōsaku* lies lengthwise across the altar for use during zazen. In front of this sits a tray which can be used to hold offerings of handwritten sutra or food. To the sides of the altar are a small bell and hollow wooden drum used to keep time while chanting, and to the side of the alcove is a small cabinet built into the wall which stores various sutra books in both Japanese and English.

It is not surprising then that even before Baikakō members prepare themselves for rehearsal, they must first prepare the empty space of the Shōunkaku to be a space for the performance of *goeika*. Unlike the inverted panopticon of the Sōdō and Shuryō, the classroom-like orientation of the sermons and lectures, or the controlled lines of sight characteristic of ceremonies in the Daisodō, the rehearsal space of the Baikakō is arranged to facilitate maximum visibility. The room is set up in such a way that a person on one side of the room can easily watch the movements of those sitting across from them while using peripheral vision to follow the motions of those sitting next to them. The rehearsal space is set up in a block-U formation, with members seated single-file along both the northern and southern walls of the room, and the bulk of the group seated two rows deep along the bottom of the U. The teacher sits by himself on a cushion at the top of the U, closing the circle. Everyone faces the center of the room.

The astute observer will note that the color of the tassels attached to the bells used during *goeika* practice create a continuum as one's eyes move from left to right along the northern wall, around the bottom of the U, and from right to left along the

southern wall. Seating around the U is determined according to rank, as determined through standardized tests administered yearly by the Baika-ryū. The lower-ranked beginners along the northern wall use purple tassels on their bells and rosaries, while the mid-level members who sit in the curve of the U have light-blue tassels. Finally, the veterans along the southern wall are distinguished by their white tassels, as is the teacher.[4]

While tassel color provides a visual means of quickly establishing who should sit where in the room, the truth is that these three colors represent eleven individually-named ranks through which a layperson can progress.[5] As a consequence, there is quite a bit of variance within the color groupings themselves. To seat themselves properly, members need to know precisely who outranks them and who is below them. Unlike the Sanzenkai, Baikakō members are seldom concerned about who is seated in "their seat"; where their seat is changes depending on who is present and who is absent. Rather, it is a game of navigating to one's proper place in an officially recognized hierarchy. By a glance, the members are able to judge from who is in attendance exactly where they should be seated for the rehearsal.

However, in marked contrast to activities in the Daisodō, Sōdō and Shuryō which facilitate a hierarchical reading by obscuring and privileging lines of sight, the roughly

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[4] When I asked members what cultural or religious significance these three colors have, they were unable to offer an answer. The progression from a dark color to a lighter color and finally to white is similarly confusing, as the martial arts leads one to think of beginners as "white belts" and experts as "black belts." Yet, martial arts may provide the clue to understanding the color scheme used in the Baika-ryū. In *kendō* (Japanese swordfighting), practitioners begin their career with their training clothes dyed a rich indigo, originally used because its scent repelled mosquitoes and snakes. As a practitioner practices, sweat and repeated washing cause the dye to fade from purple to a light-blue, with the expectation that the uniform of a master will be white from having virtually none of the original dye remaining. I have been unable to confirm whether or not this is the origin or inspiration for the Baika-ryū's color scheme, but it is nevertheless the closest parallel example I have been able to locate.

[5] The entire course requires a minimum of fourteen years to achieve the highest rank. Few of the members of the Sōjiji Baikakō feel the need to progress quickly through the official ranks, and so very seldom do rank and length of membership correspond.

oval formation used in Baikakō rehearsals creates a communal field of vision. From a musical perspective, this formation makes the most sense, as it allows members to use both their ears and eyes to keep time with the rest of the group; indeed, the semi-circle is the formation of choice for both orchestral and choral ensembles. On a deeper level, however, the Baikakō's block-U formation is intended to convey a more important message: that no one seat in the room – even that of the teacher – is more privileged than any other. It is the commonalities of practice, not the differences, which give meaning to the *shugyō* being performed in the room.

The empty space of the Shōunkaku is claimed and redefined by the Baikakō to be a space which facilitates the performance of *dōgyō* – "same practice". *Dōgyō* refers to that part of *shugyō* which stresses simultaneity, unison, and above all, group harmony. In this regard, *dōgō* highlights the shared experience of *shugyō*, as "fellow practitioners". As a part of *shugyō*, both the unsui and the lay practitioners are often exhorted to be aware and respectful of the practice of those around them. While this is good advice to anyone working closely with others, from a temporal sense, awareness allows one to time their own movements to the whole of the group. Many of the reminders are not to be too fast (so that you finish before everyone else) or too slow (such that you make everyone wait for you). Rather, one is encouraged to use all of their physical senses to fall in with the rhythm established by the group.

While the emphasis on *dōgyō,* as an aspect of *shugyō*, can be seen in all facets of temple life from ceremonies to mealtimes, the rehearsal space established by the Baikakō perhaps most embodies the synchronization of practice over any other ritual space. Here, mechanical unison trumps the differentiated simultaneity of a ceremony in the Daisodō;

here, a group offering of song trumps the privileged act of intercession which distinguishes the officiant from the assembly. In virtually no other temple context do all participants do the same thing at the same time.

Why, then, go through all of the trouble to establish rank? Why not have seating be a free-for-all? Rather than detracting from the shared experience, the hierarchical continuum of the space retains a great deal of cultural meaning and pedagogical value which actually serves to reinforce *shugyō* as a disciplining practice. This arrangement, or variations thereof, can be found throughout the traditional Japanese fine arts and martial arts. It forces the novices sitting on one side to observe and learn from the veterans sitting across from them, while preventing them from seeing (and thus picking up bad habits from) fellow beginners sitting next to them. Conversely, the veterans whose skill has been proven and refined from years of practice can keep an eye on the novices in order to correct mistakes. (My clumsy technique was often corrected by Mrs. Sakamoto and Mrs. Terasawa, both of whom sat directly across from me.) The middle ranks – not yet masters, not quite beginners – can observe and be observed by the sensei himself. They are not yet practiced enough for their skill to be taken as a given, but neither are they inexperienced enough to require constant reinforcement. The careful establishment of hierarchy is, in this regard, an important means to the end of ensuring group uniformity.

Offerings of Song

As a *kō*, the Baikakō brings together a variety of people for the common purpose of performing *goeika*. As a group that performs vocal music in a religious setting, it is

very tempting to gloss the Baikakō as a "temple chorus" or "temple choir". While the Baikakō certainly shares some surface similarities with church choirs or choruses as we know them, there are fundamental differences which distinguish the Baikakō from the typical church choir.

For one, despite fifteen hours of rehearsal a month, the Honzan Baikakō is only rarely invited to participate in ceremonies at Sōjiji. My notes show that the Baikakō was requested to perform publicly on only four occasions during the year I was a member of the group. Even the group's yearly recital held in March is attended only by the current members of the Baikakō. To my knowledge, families are never invited, and the clergy (a select number of which do receive invitations) are often too busy to attend. Rather, the Baikakō emphasizes the act of rehearsing (*keiko*) itself, rather than on public or ceremonial performance.

Sōjiji's Baikakō meets three times a month on days that end in the number seven – that is, the 7th, the 17th and the 27th of each month.[6] On rehearsal days, members begin to arrive about fifteen minutes before the scheduled start of practice, greeting those who have arrived before them with a cheerful "*ohayō gozaimasu*!" ("Good morning!") as they enter the rehearsal room. There is surprisingly little rushing as they drop off their

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[6] Despite my best efforts, the reason for this was never made clear to me. Almost none of the Baikakō members I asked ventured a guess; of the two individuals who did brave a response, the first speculated that seven was chosen because it is a "lucky" number, and the second suggested that the ending-in-seven schedule was selected because it was "easy for old people to remember." The first explanation is dubious as the number seven is actually *unlucky* in Japan: the Japanese customarily avoid the numbers four and seven as they are homonymic with the words "death" and "pain", respectively. While the second explanation is a more likely possibility, it too is doubtful given the fact that a number-based system conflicts with the weekly calendar, ultimately making the rehearsal schedule highly irregular and therefore difficult to predict; that is, if in a given month the 7th falls on a Thursday, then the 17th is a Sunday (rehearsal would be rescheduled to Monday the 18th), and the 27th is a Wednesday.

The likely explanation is that Baikakō's rehearsal schedule is based on the monastic monthly calendar in which certain regularly occurring ceremonies, activities and days of relaxation are similarly matched with days ending in a certain number. If this is the case, then it is likely that the number seven was chosen for the Baikakō rehearsal for the simple reason that days ending in seven do not conflict with anything else on the monthly monastic schedule.

belongings and begin to prepare the room and themselves for rehearsal. Newly arriving members take quick stock of what remains to be done, and divide their labor accordingly. One group takes the stools, desks and cushions out of storage and arranges them throughout the room, and another group prepares tea and distributes a variety of cookies and sweets into a number of small folded paper pouches. One woman from this group takes a cup of tea and a bag of sweets and, with a small bow, places them in the alcove where the scroll painting depicting the bodhisattva Kannon hangs.

When the room is prepared, the members gradually make their way to their seats, setting up their personal space and unpacking their things while continuing to talk with their friends. At their seats, the women don ankle-length blue choir robes over their clothes.[7] Over their shoulders, all members put a thin purple stole known as a *warakusu*, a religious garment identical in symbolism to the *rakusu* (see chapter 4), which is itself a functional adaptation of the monastic *kesa*. In addition to this, everyone wears a beaded rosary (*juzu*) on their left wrists.[8] From their bags, the members take out a richly-embroidered purple and gold bundle and place it on the desk or floor in front of them. With the sound of ripping Velcro, this bundle is opened to reveal a second bundle wrapped in a green cloth inside. The outer cover is set aside, and the green bundle is left closed for the time being.

A cushion has been placed in the front of the room for the teacher, who will himself casually enter the room minutes before rehearsal begins wearing his monastic

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[7] Men are exempt from wearing these robes. Most men instead wear blazer and slacks, though this is only an unofficial dress code.

[8] Each sect of Japanese Buddhism has a different approved style of *juzu*. Although all are similar in outward appearance, the length, number of beads on the strand, and ornamentation is standardized according to sect. The Sōtō-shū *juzu* has fifty-four beads, one of which is larger than the rest. This bead, known as the *oyadama* ("parent bead"), has two tassels hanging from it. The color *juzu* often correspond to the color of the tassels on one's *hōgu*.

robes and carrying a briefcase. Yamazaki-sensei is a handsome monk in his early forties with a clear baritone voice and a warm smile. Three times a month, he braves the two-hour drive from his home temple to Tsurumi through the dense Tokyo morning commuter traffic in order to lead the Baikakō rehearsal. As he takes his materials out of his briefcase, one of the women brings him a cup of tea on a pedestal-like saucer. He exchanges greetings and casual conversation with the group; the ease with which he relates to the group is very obviously a big hit with the Baikakō ladies.

With a last sip from his teacup, Yamazaki-sensei raises his voice to address the group and begins the rehearsal. The casual, relaxed atmosphere of the pre-rehearsal is instantly transformed: all conversation immediately stops as everyone sits up straighter in their seats and shifts their attention to the front of the room.

Rehearsal starts with a seated bow in gasshō. This bow, similar to the one made before zazen, acknowledges the teacher and the others in the room with whom one will be practicing. It is also a show of respect to the *hōgu* (literally, "dharma objects") that are contained in the bundles that sit before them. Most significantly, this bow marks the entrance into ritual space and time: until the "parentheses" are closed with a similar bow at the end of rehearsal, everything contained within is meant to be separate and distinct from everyday activity.

In silence (and in unison), the teachers and members begin to carefully unwrap the bundles that sit in front of them. The green cloth that wraps the bundle is unfolded with both hands, first smoothing out the right side, and then the left side. The inside of the cloth is a rich purple with intricate gold embroidery of plum flowers along the edges; the temple crests of both Sōjiji and Eiheiji dominate the center. This cloth is known as a

fukusa; in addition to containing the items inside for safe transport, the *fukusa* serves as a kind of placemat for the items when they are in use, creating a respectful barrier between the items and the floor.

Opening the *fukusa* cloth reveals several items arranged on top of a thick book. First, a flat, hollow silver bell (*shō*) is removed from the pile and placed on the lower right corner of the mat. A thin hammer (*shumoku*) is placed next to the *shō*, its long tassel arranged carefully alongside it. Next, a tall handbell (*rei*) is stood vertically on the lower left corner of the mat. Care is taken while lifting the handbell to keep the bell quiet as it is moved, but even still a number of accidental ringings punctuate the silence to the embarrassment of their owners. For the moment, the songbook – which, like other religious texts, is called a *kyōten* – is left closed in the center of the mat.

The moving and placement of each of the items follows a carefully prescribed order and rhythm. The simple act of opening the right flap of the cloth is a complex motion which requires that the hands be placed in line, left over right, with the fabric gripped gently between the index and middle fingers. In a single movement, as the fabric is pulled to the side, the palm of the hand is used to smooth out any wrinkles in the cloth. The hands are then repositioned to open the left flap in a similar fashion. It is important that the proper placement of the different items be accompanied by a graceful, deliberate and above all, precise bodily movement: the cloth is not so much opened as it is *placed* in an open position; the handbell is not so much stood up as it is *placed* in a standing position. Like so much of Zen ritual, emphasis is placed not on the efficiency or speed of a movement, but rather on the smoothness and grace by which the motion is performed.

In this regard, it is important to note that there is nothing intrinsically "sacred" or otherwise special about the items contained within the *hōgu* bundle, any more than there is anything special about the store-bought tea and sweets offered to the image of Kannon. While it may appear absurd on the surface to spend an hour wrapping and unwrapping a set of bells until the group gets it right, the very act of handling the bells with attentiveness and care imbues the items – and the music they will be used to make – with the aura of an "offering" *(osonae)*. The reverse is also true: treating the *hōgu* as part of an offering encourages the owner to treat their materials with attentiveness and care. Much rehearsal time will be spent practicing and reinforcing these very basic movements to make them automatic: indeed, proper handling of the *hōgu* is as much a part of the practice of *goeika* as the music itself.

Harmony in Dissonance

Having prepared their tools and space, the teacher uses his *shumoku* hammer to strike a small wooden clapper, producing a sharp crack. On cue, the group opens their books to the first page and places it in front of them. One of the women sitting across from me leads the group in the Baikakō pledge:

Watakushi wa Baikaryū eisanka o tooshite,	Through the songs of the Baikaryū,
tadashii shinkō ni ikimasu.	we will live in correct belief.
Watakushi wa Baikaryū eisanka o tooshite,	Through the songs of the Baikaryū,
nakayoi kurashi o itashimasu.	we will live a lifestyle of harmony.
Watakushi wa Baikaryū eisanka o tooshite,	Through the songs of the Baikaryū,
akarui yo no naka o tsukurimasu.	we will make a brighter world.

The Baikakō rehearsal opens with three bows (*sanpai*) and the recital of the *Kaikyōge*, an acknowledgement by the assembly that they will do their best to understand the teaching that is to follow. The Baikakō continues with a recitation of the *Sangemon*, the *Sankiraimon*, and finally, the Heart Sutra. With the final bow that follows the Heart Sutra, the opening service is over, and rehearsal begins in earnest.

Rehearsals are full-day events that run from ten in the morning to three in the afternoon with regular bathroom and tea breaks, and an hour-long lunch break at noon. While the rehearsal format is highly structured in nature, the rehearsals themselves are in reality very relaxed occasions. There are only a few times during the year where there is any kind of itinerary or lesson plan, and these usually precede the yearly testing (for those who wish to advance in rank), a national or regional convention, or before the group is scheduled to participate in a temple ceremony. At all other times, the rehearsal is generally left open to requests from the members. Should no-one offer a suggestion, the teacher might choose a song thematically related to the closest major Buddhist holiday, but more often than not will choose a song already familiar to a majority of those present.

Once the song has been decided, the members will hold the songbook with both hands, raise it to eye-level, and bow their heads. The members will then turn the book to the appropriate page by gripping the back of the book with the left hand and opening the front with the right hand to reveal the song. The songbooks are not bound on their spines, but are rather printed in an accordion-fold fashion such that the entire book, if opened to its full length, would be one continuous page. The accordion-fold printing allows both two- and four-page songs to be read without the need to turn pages.

Yamazaki-sensei will often preface the *goeika* to be rehearsed with a short, usually anecdotal, speech to elucidate the important themes and meanings of the particular song for the group. In spite of the ritual formality of the space, the impromptu nature of this "mini-sermon" also works to make the atmosphere in the rehearsal more relaxed and conversational. Unlike a formal sermon, the Baikakō members are fully engaged in the teacher's story, reacting with non-verbal cues and at times even interjecting their own opinions. While the majority of the teacher's speeches are brief, the more engaging discussions can extend well into the allotted rehearsal time.

When his speech is finished, Yamazaki-sensei will perform the song it its entirety by himself, using the hammer and small wood block to mark the rhythm. Many members bring personal recording devices to record the teacher's recitation of the songs, turning their recorders on when he starts singing and off when he finishes. (I was the only one who recorded full rehearsals.) Several Baikakō members I spoke to reported regularly using these recordings as a reference for when they practiced at home; one woman said that she listens to her tape recordings on a loop while she does her daily housework.

Listening to and internalizing the teacher's recitation of the songs is a fundamental part of the way *goeika* is transmitted. Like many traditional Japanese arts, *goeika* has historically been taught by a master/teacher through example and repetition to their disciple/student. One elderly informant (though not a Baikakō member herself) vividly recalled learning *goeika* as a child in rural Ibaraki Prefecture during the 1930s in this fashion. Once a week, she told me, neighbors would come to her house to learn from her grandmother, a respected *goeika* teacher. "On days when my grandmother would teach, our house would be full of people – from wall to wall, only people. She would sing

one line, and then everyone would repeat it. Back then, no one read music. We learned by listening and memorizing the songs."

To a substantial degree, these recitations – and the mini-sermons which preface them – shape the way in which the songs are internalized and interpreted by the Baikakō participants. The teacher, as a master (*shiso*), is held as a model to be emulated exactly and more-or-less unquestioningly by the disciple (*deshi*). The teacher's interpretation of a given song – for example, his tone, his vibrato and his ornamentations – is mimicked by the Baikakō members to the best of their ability. One woman, a long-time member who now only attends rehearsals sporadically, was very critical about this practice. Rather than place the blame on the members, who in her opinion were doing what diligent students should, she thought that the teacher himself was acting irresponsibly. In her opinion, a *good* teacher (subtly implying that Yamazaki-sensei was not), would keep the talking during rehearsal to a minimum, and during his recitations, would sing the songs exactly as they are written on the page, that is, flat and unornamented. "Instead of teaching, he gives us a concert," she told me. "This is not a karaoke group, you know."

Following the teacher's recitation, the teacher leads the group in a line by line practice of the song while keeping time with the wood block: first he sings the line, and then the group repeats the line back to him. Other than the crack of the wood block (which is sharp enough to be heard through all other sound), the teacher does not conduct the group in any visible way. The group almost never uses their bells during this part of practice, but it is not uncommon to see members pantomiming the bell movements or trying to match the teacher's rhythm by tapping their knee or thighs with sweeping vertical movements. Often the result is that the visual trumps the audible: the movements

of one or two members, slightly ahead or behind the beat, will throw off the members sitting next to them, creating a domino effect through which dissonance ripples throughout the room. It is not uncommon for the group to practice the same line several times in succession as the teacher stops to smooth out difficult or complicated sections of the music.

When each line of the verse has been individually rehearsed, the group will practice the verse in its entirety, this time using the handbell and flat bell. Most *goeika*, especially the metered *gowasan*[9], is written in 4/4 time, with each beat of the measure punctuated by a different hand motion. The handbell is held in the left hand, and the hammer in the right. During the song, they are used in conjunction in the following pattern:

Beat one: the hammer is swung to strike the flat bell
Beat two: the head of the hammer is audibly placed on the desk/floor
Beat three: the handbell is flicked forward to produce a single ring
Beat four: the handbell is flicked again for a single ring

The combined effect is to produce a *clang-thud-ring-ring* pattern that is repeated throughout the entire song.

For all but the most experienced (or ambidextrous) of practitioners, proper use of the bells is easily the most difficult part of *goeika* practice. Ringing the bells in a manner that combines a pleasing sound with graceful movement requires a level of precision that comes only from years of repeated habituation and practice. Take, for example, striking the flat bell with the hammer. While sounding simple in theory, proper form is to hold the hammer with only the thumb and forefinger, creating an axis of motion; the remaining three fingers are used only to hold the long tassel that extends from the end of the

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[9] *Gowasan* is a style of metered *goeika* written in four verses of seven and five syllable phrases.

hammer to prevent it from flying out of one's hand. The hammer is not used to strike as much as it is made to fall against the flat bell in a controlled manner. To heavy of a fall produces a painful, ear-piercing crack; too light of a fall will glance off of the bell, producing a muddled sound. Similarly, the handbell is held in an awkward hand position meant to simulate *gasshō*; this requires that the entirety of the forearm, and not the fingers, be used to produce a sound. Too much of a flick of the arm will cause the clapper to ring against both the front and the back of the bell, producing two sounds instead of one; too light of a flick, or holding the bell in a way that tries to use the fingers to control movement will result in no sound at all.

For most of these movements, the practitioner has only a fraction of a second to move their hands into proper position. When combined with the reading of music and singing, the movements required for proper use of the bells are simply too fast to be left to conscious thought. In this regard, the practice of *goeika* has much in common with the zazen practitioner's pursuit of *shikantaza*. For one to properly perform *goeika*, it is essential that use of the bells be made automatic and habitual, and this can only be done through diligent and repeated practice. Allowing conscious thought to dominate one's actions by worrying about timing or technique will invariably lead to mistakes. At the group level, the mistakes of even a single person create dissonance.

It comes as no surprise then that adding the bells to the practice of a song almost invariably counteracts the work that was done while the song was being practiced line by line with only voices. As with *shikantaza*, "non-thinking" is often an elusive ideal for the Baikakō members. In *goeka* practice, there are many factors to be concern oneself with, and it is easy for a practitioner to find their attention split in a myriad of directions: the

written music, the words on the page, the rhythm of each syllable, the flow of the song, the placement of one's hands, the movement of the bells, the sound and tempo of one's neighbor, the sharp crack of the sensei's wooden block, errant ringings, missed notes, even the sound of the monks' footsteps in the halls outside. While keeping these thoughts in check is difficult for any individual, these difficulties are cumulative and are multiplied exponentially in a group. The resultant effect is that even the most rehearsed song threatens to become a cacophony as the practitioners, at both the individual and group level, struggle to keep their focus.

Learning to discipline one's body and mind amidst this eternal struggle between harmony and discord is very much the point of the Baikakō's *shugyō*. In a sense, the rehearsal space is the world in microcosm: even when care is taken to set everything in its proper place, life is filled with elements that threaten to destroy the harmony in which one wishes to live. By placing emphasis on the rehearsal rather than the public performance, the practitioners are encouraged to focus not on preparing for one perfect performance of a song (which even if possible, would only be a fleeting thing), but on the act of disciplining itself.

When each verse has been rehearsed to the teacher's satisfaction – though not necessarily to the satisfaction of the individual members – the song is ready to be performed. The performance of *goeika*, even in the context of a rehearsal, is treated as an offering *from* the group, though *to whom* is deliberately never specified. Two individual members are chosen as leaders – usually in order of decreasing seniority, with the two highest ranking members getting the first song, and the next two highest getting the

second song, and so on – to start the performance. While the group holds their hands in *gasshō*, the first leader slowly and solemnly chants the title of the song:

Tonae tatematsuru {title} *goeika/gowasan ni.*
"We offer this recitation of the {title} *goeika/gowasan.*"

The leader draws out her/his intonation of the syllable *ei* in '*goeika*' (or *wa* in '*gowasan*'), adding a vibrato which vacillates by as much as a half-step below the pitch: this is a stylistic signal similar to the one used when the cantor calls the title of a sutra or chant during a ceremony. This vibrato serves as a cue to the assembly that the group will be starting in two syllables.[10] As the leader intones this syllable, the group bows their heads, both in recognition of the leader's call, and in respect to the presentation of the offering.

The second leader then sings the first phrase of the song by her or himself while the group brings their bells to a ready position. In addition to the pressure of having to perform solo in front of the entire group, the leader who sings the first phrase has the responsibility of setting the key for the entire song. *Goeika*, like many forms of Japanese music, does not use absolute pitch (C, F sharp, B flat, etc.) but instead uses relative pitch (*do*, *mi*, *so*, etc.). This relies on the ability of the leader to accurately intuit the vocal range of the group as a whole: if the key is set either too high or too low, many of the notes will be out of reach for the group. While the teacher will usually use his electronic pitchpipe to give the leader the appropriate starting pitch beforehand, hearing the person before them recite the title (which can be chanted at any pitch that is comfortable to the chanter) often throws off the pitch of the first line. As a result, the person chosen to

[10] The role of this vacillation was made clear to me after I participated in a ceremony during which the leader forgot to perform the drop in tone which serves as the audible cue to the assembly to begin I watched in amused disbelief as the leader – a high ranking and respected priest – recited the entire sutra by himself because the assembled unsui, though clearly aware that they *should* be chanting, did not get the necessary cue and thought better of joining in I witnessed similar miscues several more times over the course of my fieldwork

perform the first phrase is often unsure of the pitch and uncomfortable with both their solo performance and the responsibility to start the song; more often than not, this is the moment that *goeika* performances break down, to the embarrassment of the leader who will usually ask for a do-over until she or he gets it right. Nervous or struggling leaders are often helped by the group to find the right pitch. For some leaders, it is a welcome relief to have the support of the group behind them; for others, it is an embarrassment to have to rely on the assistance of the group.

Very rarely will the sensei interrupt a song once the entire group starts singing, though he will do so if the tempo, rhythm or pitch are irrevocably lost. In all other instances, the group will sing through – or in some cases, plow through – to the end of the song, with the sensei using the wood block to keep tempo or raising his voice to be loud enough to keep the song in key if necessary.

At the end of the song, the group finishes as one, holding their hammers horizontally in front of them and bowing their heads. The group then carefully – and ideally, silently – replaces their handbell on the mat, and carefully arranges the hammer and its tassel in front of them. Placing their hands again in *gasshō*, the members look around to wait for everyone to be ready. In unison, the group bows, and the offering is complete. In almost every case, the sensei is the one to break the silence that follows the last bow, replacing the ritual formality of the performance-offering with a more relaxed atmosphere.

All told, it takes roughly an hour to practice one song from start to finish. With the hour-long lunch break at noon, a normal Baikakō rehearsal will cover only about four songs, with an average of forty minutes per hour spent in actual practicing. Roughly the

first ten minutes of every hour are given as a break for members to use the bathroom, drink tea and socialize, while the next ten are spent listening to Yamazaki-sensei's mini-sermon. While it would be possible for rehearsal to move at a more rigorous pace, my experience has been that the Baikakō members enjoy the more relaxed pace and atmosphere set by Yamazaki-sensei. This pace is not for everyone, however: as one disapproving member emphatically told me, "This isn't *shugyō*, it's a coffee circle!"

As the time approaches three in the afternoon, Yamazaki-sensei brings rehearsal to a close. Recalling the solemn attentiveness of the beginning of rehearsal, the rehearsal ends with the chanting of the *ekōmon*, the "Transfer of Merit" verse which redistributes the good merit generated by the group's *shugyō* for the betterment of all living things. This is followed by a single sitting bow in *gasshō*, the closing of the ritual parentheses, at which point the rehearsal can be said to be officially over.

The presence of the Transfer of Merit verse at the end of the rehearsal as ritual is expected, but the way in which it is performed is a sharp departure from the norm. In nearly all other ritual instances, the *ekōmon* is chanted by the cantor in a single voice, on behalf of the assembly. At the Baikakō rehearsal, all of the participants recite the Transfer of Merit verse in unison, a powerful reinforcement of the principle of *dōgyō*.

As before, the teacher is the one to break the silence with a customary "*otsukaresama deshita*" ("You must be tired!"). The rehearsal is now officially ended. The members carefully – but this time, unsolemnly – rewrap their bundles for transport. The women remove their choir robes, fold them, and put them away. Once one's personal space is taken care of, members move quickly to return the Shōunkaku to its pre-rehearsal state, again dividing the labor between them. One group collects the teacups for

washing and the candy wrappers for disposal, while another group stacks the stools, desks and cushions for storage. A third group breaks out brooms, and sweeps the tatami for any crumbs that may have fallen during rehearsal. Working together, the entire room is reverted to its original state as potential space in fewer than five minutes.

Members usually leave the room in small groups, walking together on their way to their cars or the Tsurumi train station. They will continue their conversations as they walk through the halls of the temple. As they leave through the entrance to the temple reception, some will make a detour to pay their respects at the Daisodō or to visit the shrines to the bodhisattva Jizō. Occasionally, they will stop for coffee at one of the many cafés near the station, but most will say their goodbyes and go directly home, not to meet again until the next rehearsal.

The Fall and Rise of the Honzan Baikakō

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the Baikakō thrived at Sōjiji. By 1980, however, the fortunes of the Baikakō had completely reversed. As the decade progressed, interest and membership in the Baikakō started to decline precipitously. This decline was not as a result of any intragroup conflict or politics, but owed primarily to natural attrition: old age and illness increasingly made it difficult for long-time members to continue their participation, and when death eventually took them, there were fewer and fewer younger people interested in practicing *goeika* to take their place.

By 1999, the Baikakō was in critical condition. As membership declined, their membership dues could no longer afford to support a *goeika* teacher. Only three women

remained in the Honzan Baikakō, and these dedicated three were left to practice by themselves with tape recordings taking the place of a formal teacher. Without a teacher, and without a group to sing with, these women quickly lost the enjoyment of performing *goeika.*

The three remaining Baikakō members approached both the head of the Fukyō-ryō and the abbot for permission to officially dissolve the ailing Honzan Baikakō. Mrs. Sakamoto, the current *kō* leader, was one of the three women. She explained to me how the two priests sternly refused to acknowledge the possibility that Sōjiji – one of the two flagships of the Sōtō Zen sect – would be without a Baikakō. "They would not allow us to quit," she told me. "They gave us a phone directory of all of the Sōjiji parishioners, and let us use the phones in the Fukyō-ryō. Between the three of us, we called every number on that list, saying that the Baikakō was looking for new members." Despite Sōjiji having over five thousand parishioner families, these cold-calling efforts were met with almost no success.

Leaving no possibility unexplored, the two priests approached the women who were employed as part-time workers at Sōjiji. For the most part, the part-time workers at the temple had no previous religious ties to Sōjiji or even to the Sōtō sect. Nearly all of them had found employment at Sōjiji based on the temple being within walking distance of their homes. Of the roughly two dozen part-time workers at Sōjiji, only three answered the call to join the Baikakō. None of the three had any experience with *goeika* prior to joining the Baikakō, but their agreeing to participate effectively doubled the membership of the group.

As part of the recruitment effort, posters for the Baikakō were printed and posted around Sōjiji. Those who remember them describe the posters as featuring the text of the Heart Sutra as a background along with a caption promising that Baikakō "members would come to understand the teachings of Buddhism". The poster campaign was demonstrably more successful in attracting new members than cold-calling the temple's parishioner base had been. The posters were hung around the temple in high-traffic areas to ensure maximum visibility. The majority of the new members attracted by the posters were parishioners of other Sōtō temples who had come to Sōjiji for reasons of religious tourism; as with the cold calling, the posters generated almost no interest from Sōjiji parishioners. While the reasons why both cold-calling and the poster campaign failed to recruit any members from the Sōjiji parishioner base can only be left to speculation, the end result was that the current membership of the Honzan Baikakō is comprised exclusively of parishioners of other Sōtō Zen temples.

One of the new members attracted by the posters was Mrs. Muraki, a retired schoolteacher. Her natal family was affiliated with the Nichiren sect (at a loss for the name of the sect, she describes it as "the one that chants *Namu Myōhōrengekyō*"), but Mrs. Muraki was a devout Christian for nearly all of her life, regularly attending Sunday mass at a Protestant church near her home. When her husband passed away in 1998, funeral preparations revealed that his family were parishioners of a rural Sōtō Zen temple in northwestern Japan.[11] His funeral and subsequent memorial services were officiated by a Sōtō priest in Yokohama hired for the occasion by the funeral company they used.

[11] As Reader (1991: 89) and others have shown, it is not uncommon for Japanese to be unfamiliar with the teachings, *bodaiji*, and even the name of the sect to which their families "belong" as *danka*. For many Japanese families, this information only becomes relevant when a family member dies, and a common service provided by funeral companies is to locate this information for the bereaved family.

The loss of her husband was the start of a difficult time for Mrs. Muraki. She described the year that followed as one in which she was "lost and filled with anxiety" (*mayotte nayamimashita*). Feeling that her new role as a Sōtō Buddhist widow was in conflict with her previous identity as a Christian, she stopped going to church and fully gave up her Christianity. At the time, Mrs. Muraki knew very little about Buddhism and even less about Sōtō Zen. As a Christian, much of her religiosity was bound in reading and a personal understanding of the Bible; however, the fact that she couldn't understand the meaning or even words of the Buddhist sutra that were chanted by the Sōtō priest at her husband's funeral deeply distressed her. Having been religious her entire life and newly responsible for properly observing memorial obligations to her husband, she found herself between two religious worlds: she felt that she could no longer be a good Christian, but she also felt that she did not know enough to be a good Buddhist.

It was during this period that her granddaughter began attending the kindergarten affiliated with Sōjiji. Mrs. Muraki first heard about the monthly sermons at Sōjiji through a newsletter her granddaughter brought home one day. Sermons were a part of religious life with which, as a Christian, she felt she could identify and she began attending these monthly meetings regularly. One day, as she was leaving Sōjiji, Mrs. Muraki noticed the recruitment poster for the Baikakō.

Thinking that the Baikakō was a discussion group like the Bible reading circles that she was familiar with at her old church, she nervously approached the reception desk and asked one of the monks staffing the desk about the poster. The young monk, at a loss for how to define *goeika*, explained that it was "like" sutra chanting. Mrs. Muraki immediately signed up, but it took her several months to gather the courage to attend her

first Baikakō rehearsal; not wanting to be embarrassed by her ignorance of Buddhism, she spent those months practicing chanting sutra at home until she felt she was ready to join her peers. She laughed when she told me this. "If I had known it was singing, I wouldn't have been so nervous!"

Of the current membership, fully a third joined during the recruitment campaign of 1999. In the course of the next several years, membership in the Baikakō gradually recovered in strength, though never as quickly as it had during the first stages of the membership drive. By 2008, the group's official roster counted thirty-five members, an impressive recovery by any measure.

While the same forces of natural attrition – infirmity, illness and death – continue to impact the group's membership at a constant rate, the reinvigorated Baikakō has had more success in attracting new members to fill vacancies. Word of mouth, with members encouraging friends to join, has been an important part of the group's recovery. An equally powerful recruitment tool has been the recent push to include *goeika* as an essential part of the liturgy in Sōtō funerals and memorial services. Several members I spoke with independently reported that their interest in *goeika* stemmed from first hearing *goeika* at the funeral or memorial service.

With the exception of three individuals who had been members of Baikakō at other Sōtō temples, none of the new members had any experience performing *goeika* prior to joining Sōjiji's Baikakō. When I asked what precipitated their decision to begin to practice *goeika*, virtually all responses fit into one of five types of answers, with several reporting a combination of motivations. Predictably, the three part-time workers responded that their interest in *goeika* began when the abbot requested volunteers from

among the pool of part-time workers to join the ailing Baikakō. A similar number joined for social reasons: one told me that she simply "wanted to sing with a group", while one of the three male practitioners was encouraged to join "because there were so few men". Five reported being influenced by the practice of family members, with four of the five describing childhood memories of one or both parents performing *goeika*. Four responded that they became interested in the practice of *goeika* as a means of personal or spiritual cultivation; one respondent wrote to me that she began her practice of *goeika* "to quiet [her] mind, and also to turn bad thoughts into good ones" (*kokoro ga yasuraka ni nareru, akushin mo yoi kokoro ni*).

Songs of Memory and Loss

By far the most common reason given for beginning practice of *goeika* was as a way of honoring the memory of a deceased family member, a spouse or a friend. Roughly a third of respondents reported that their *goeika* practice originated in a desire to perform *kuyō* (offerings for the dead). Most of those who responded in this way specified the person in whose memory they practice *goeika*; two, however, responded with a more general *senzo kuyō*, or offerings for a person's ancestors.

In this regard, it is telling that when I asked which song is their favorite, most Baikakō members answered that the *Tsuizen Kuyō* ("Memorial Service") *Gowasan* is their favorite song. At first consideration, this is a very curious preference. The *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* is a sorrowful, mournful song. The melody is composed in the pentatonic minor mode heard most commonly in contemporary Japanese *enka* songs. With *goeika*,

as with *enka*, the pentatonic minor mode is used to great effect to evoke emotions of loss, loneliness, nostalgia, heartbreak and sadness.

While the lyrics to the song date from within the past fifty years, they are written in an older, poetic language seldom heard in contemporary speech. This imparts a sense of the words being themselves time-worn relics of a fading past, complementing the somber tone of the music:

Tama to musubite hachisuba ni	The jewel bound to the lotus flower
Okitaru tsuyu no ichi shizuku	is but one drop of dew.
Nagaki wa hito no negai ni te	Long are the prayers of humans
Mijikaki mono wa inochi nari	and such a short thing is life.
Kinō ari shi wa kyō wa yume	What was here yesterday is today but a dream.
Utsutsu ni miyuru misugata wa	In reality, the forms we see
Kokoro no naka no kage ni shite	are merely the shadows within our heart.
Awaseru te koso makoto naru	Truth exists only in our joined palms.

I learned to recognize the song in performance from the powerful vocal swell which reoccurs in the third line of each stanza. As the singers move into the higher ranges of their voices, the music becomes hauntingly reminiscent of a wail of grief. In fact, so moving are performances of the *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* that performers are often led to tears well before the song has ended.

As its name implies, the song is most often heard in the context of memorial services; in earlier field notes and recordings, I had described it as a "musical interlude" during these ceremonies. Yet, despite its somber association, the *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* was the single most requested song at Baikakō rehearsals. Even if they could not remember the lyrics by heart, most members could sing the melody from memory. I wondered: was *this* the song that first attracted so many to *goeika*? Why, with all of the positive, life-affirming songs to choose from, why was so much time and attention given to a *goeika* that spoke only of life's brevity and futility?

I approached these questions with Mrs. Inamura during a tea break on a particularly warm day in May. With over twenty years of *goeika* practice, Mrs. Inamura is the single most experienced member of Sōjiji's Baikakō. Like others I spoke to, she had told me that the *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* was her favorite *goeika*. Rather than asking her why it was her favorite (a question which tended to make people uncomfortable by forcing them to verbalize something they had never thought about), I hoped that her experience would allow her insight as to why the Baikakō members repeatedly – and voluntarily – subject themselves to such a painfully emotional ordeal.

"Life is painful at times," she said gently, as if she were talking to her grandchild. "And, death is a part of life. When someone dies, it is very sad."

I told her that I understood this. I tried to explain that what I did not get was that, as I understood the teachings of Sōtō Zen, when a person dies, they become a *hotoke* and live forever in the memory of their descendants as an ancestor. The somber language of the lyrics of the *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* seemed to me very uncharacteristic of the hopeful message put forth by the clergy in sermons and eulogies. "Shouldn't death be something to celebrate?" I asked.

"Joshua, you're young", she said to me in the same kind, grandmotherly tone. "If you want to speak to your parents or your wife, you can call them on the telephone. If you want to see them, they can come visit you here. Things change as you get older. My husband has gone to the other side (*mukō ni ikimashita*). If I want to speak to him, I have to visit his grave. I will never see him again in this life."

As she said this, tears began to well in her eyes. I sat in dumb silence, not knowing what to say or do. I felt stupid and guilty – forgetting for a moment the astounding naïveté that the question revealed, I had just made an old lady cry.

Within seconds, she effortlessly regained her perfect composure, smiling as if we had been talking about gardening or the weather – anything but death. "Shall we sing it together?", she offered. While the rest of the group chatted over their tea and cookies, Mrs. Inamura and I bowed in *gasshō*, and prepared to perform the song. Following her lead, we started with the third verse.

Mina o shizuka ni tonoureba *Omoi wa sara ni iyamashinu* *Onozuto nijimu namida ni mo* *Eishi no fukaki yue o shiru*	If I quietly intone your name, my thoughts will further intensify. Naturally, [my eyes] will also blur with tears and I will know how deep our connection goes.
Sonau hanabana haewatari *Magokoro akeki miakashi to* *Mairasu kō ni tsutsumarete* *Mitama yo towa ni yasurawan*	The flowers I offer give off their light, and my devotion is illumined by candlelight. I am enveloped in the incense I have burned, and I find peace in the permanence of your soul.

We finished our song, and one of the other women came by to fill our teacups.

As we sipped our tea, I asked Mrs. Inamura how she came to be interested in *goeika*. "It's something I do for my father," she replied. "He was a Sōtō priest." I told her that I had no idea that she was a temple daughter. "Oh, I wasn't," she said.

She explained that her father was a particularly devout Sōtō layman who idealized the monastic lifestyle and had always dreamed of becoming a monk. Some of her fondest memories are from when she was little, when she would sit with him while he chanted sutra in front of the family *butsudan* in their house in Shizuoka. When she was five, her father made the decision to realize his lifelong dream. He took the tonsure and left his family to become an unsui at a temple whose name she could not remember.

Tragically, he was dead within three years, felled by heart failure in the course of his *shugyō*. He was forty-five years old. Seventy-three years later, Mrs. Inamura still blames his death on the severity of his *shugyō*. "If he hadn't become a monk, maybe he would have lived to be a grandfather," she told me.

I was stunned. I understood that unsui occasionally do die in training, though this is less true today than in previous times. How could she continue to be such a devout participant in the religion that had literally killed her father? Choosing my words carefully, I told her that had it been my father, I think I would have ended up having no religion at all. "It's not like that," she replied. "When I sing *goeika*, I feel like my father is watching over me. It is like when I used to chant sutra with him. I remember the sound of his voice. This is *kuyō* for my father."

As I walked home from rehearsal that afternoon, it finally made sense to me why Mrs. Inamura had chosen to start the song in the middle. Very subtly, she was communicating to me through the music what I was clearly not getting through words: that by concentrating on the grief that the *Tsuizen Kuyō Gowasan* expressed and brought out in those who heard it or performed, I had been focusing on the wrong part of the song. Or, at least not the part that the members of the group choose to focus on.

Flowers that Bloom in Winter

As I came to understand, the practice of *goeika*, as a form of *shugyō*, serves a variety of functions to the practitioner. For many, the initial draw to *goeika* is in its potential for helping a survivor come to terms with grief, sadness, and loss. Musically

and poetically, the *goeika* songs have the power to invoke deep emotional responses from both performer and listener. The regular performance of painfully evocative songs is not intended to be a masochistic trial of emotional endurance. As with all *shugyō*, *goeika* practice operates on the cultural principle that hardship and adversity – when properly embraced – can be personally and socially transformative. For the mourner, the Baikakō provides a safe atmosphere by which the practitioner can face their grief alongside others who are likely to understand their pain. Together, the Baikakō members practice at cultivating a disciplined grace in the face of life's hardships.

As a form of *kuyō*, moreover, the songs allow practitioners to do something to benefit those that they have lost. Through ritual cues, each recitation becomes an "offering of song" believed to generate karmic merit that can be transferred to succor the spirits of loved ones, friends, and ancestors. It is for this reason that the dedication phrase of a *goeika* performance is carefully worded not to specify a recipient: each individual practitioner is encouraged to fill in the blanks for themselves, and dedicate their own performance as they see fit. G*oeika* becomes a means for practitioners to cultivate the virtue of selflessness in themselves, while allowing them to directly nurture and aid those loved ones who are normally beyond their reach.

This is not to suggest that *goeika* practice necessitates a funereal atmosphere. Much to the contrary, for most members, the Baikakō provides an affirming, positive space in which practitioners can create lasting relationships with other members through years of shared practice. Even more importantly, *goeika* practice allows the practitioner to reorient themselves to new aspirations, new relationships, new accomplishments, and the discovery of new talents.

Seen in this light, participation in the Baikakō might best be understood as a culturally meaningful way for a person to negotiate new social identities for themselves in the face of major life transitions. The message of the Baikakō – as embodied in song, in shared practice, and in harmony – is a declaration of hope, a statement of trust in a process of self-cultivation that enables its practitioners to move from one stage of life to another with grace and dignity.

Chapter VI

Kuyō

The Indefatigable Mrs. Terasawa

Before I joined the Baikakō, Mr. Takeuchi had warned me about Mrs. Terasawa. She could be very hard on new members, especially men. It took six months before she would even acknowledge his presence, he said. She was vocal in her belief that the Baikakō should be a woman's space: let the men have their zazen.

I admit that I was nervous around Mrs. Terasawa the first time I met her. Immediately upon entering the rehearsal space, one could tell that she was the dominant force in the room. Mrs. Terasawa spoke quickly and much more informally than that to which I was normally accustomed. She dressed like the other Baikakō women, but she was unique in that her hair was always covered with a headscarf. Despite her small stature, she reminded me of pictures of Rosie the Riveter in both appearance and demeanor.

Before and after every rehearsal, Mrs. Terasawa had a continuous stream of members coming to her to ask questions, and she would answer in a voice which could trump all other conversation in the room. Announcements to the group were made at her prerogative.

In many ways, Mrs. Terasawa *was* the Baikakō. At the very least, the Baikakō was hers.

At my second rehearsal, as the group was preparing to break for lunchtime, Mrs. Terasawa shouted to me across the room: *Oniisan, kite yo!* ("Hey young man, come over here!") Diligently, I hurried across the room, and kneeled in *seiza* at the foot of her desk.

"Can you eat this?" she asked. She handed me a handmade rice ball, not the kind that I had bought from convenience stores. I can, I replied. I thanked her as I unwrapped the packaging, and bit into the ball. It was delicious.

"How about this – can you eat it?" she asked, and passed over a piece of fried egg. Still chewing the rice ball, I replied again that I could. She placed several pieces of egg on the cellophane wrapping.

"And this?," she asked again. "I can eat it," I replied. This exchange continued with every item she had brought from home until I had a feast laid out on the cellophane in front of me. She handed me a set of disposable chopsticks, and indicated that I should start eating.

It had been months since I had eaten food that I hadn't bought at a store or prepared in a microwave. With each new food that she placed in front of me, I closed my eyes when I bit into it, and proclaimed "It's delicious!" Perhaps I was emulating too well the formula that I had seen countless times in cooking shows on Japanese TV, but my reaction wasn't simply melodrama: Mrs. Terasawa's cooking really was that good.

At the end of that first meal, Mrs. Terasawa told me that I shouldn't worry about bringing lunch to Baikakō rehearsal anymore. She would bring lunch for me, and I would eat with her.

It wasn't a request. It was a command.

From then on, every time the rehearsal would break for lunch, I would prepare my notes until Mrs. Terasawa was done with Baikakō business. When she was ready for me, she would summon me by shouting over the din, "Joshua-saaan, *gohan!*" ("Lunchtime!"). I would quickly put my notebooks away, and sit on the floor in front of her while she unwrapped all manner of delicious home-cooked food. When I told my fiancée about this, she laughed and said that it sounded like Mrs. Terasawa had just adopted a puppy.

The mealtimes were all the same dance. Mrs. Terasawa would ask me, "Can you eat this?," and I would reply that I could. Even with years of eating all manner of Japanese food, every rehearsal brought something new for me.

Perhaps it was my ability to eat all of her home cooked food, or perhaps it was simply my willingness to do so: Mrs. Terasawa and I bonded quickly. As I began to get to know her, she told me that cooking was something that she did as a hobby. As a mother and a housewife, she had cooked for a household of four. Now that her daughters had moved out and married, there were two fewer mouths to feed. The problem was, she never changed her recipes to accommodate fewer people in her household. As a consequence, her refrigerator was always full with leftovers. Luckily, I provided a happy solution to that problem.

The other Baikakō women would sometimes pass me some of the food they brought from home, but it was never a question that I "belonged" to Mrs. Terasawa, and that her food took priority. I don't recall ever being invited to join other groups during lunchtime, nor was I invited to join the men of the Baikakō, who lunched together at a local tempura shop.

As time went on, the members of the Baikakō started making passing reference to Mrs. Terasawa as my "Japanese grandmother" (*nihon no Obaachan*). She looked after me, making sure that I was kept in the loop about important temple events, especially when priests would arrive or leave Sōjiji. When the national Baikakō meeting rolled around, she found a ticket for me, even though the application deadline was months before I joined the group.

Mrs. Terasawa had a knack for pushing me out of my comfort zone, especially when she could intuit that it might be important for my research. On one occasion, the Baikakō was paying a condolence call to the wake of a prominent, long-time member of Sōjiji's Fujinkai. Mrs. Terasawa had suggested that I introduce myself to the officiating priest, but I resisted, thinking that someone's funeral was neither the time nor the place to bring up something as gauche as research. I made an excuse that it was getting late, and that I should probably go. She said that she understood, and if I waited a couple of minutes for her to take care of something first, she would take the train back to Tsurumi with me. As I promptly found out, her "taking care of something" was finding a place for me at the table set up for the mourning family, right next to the officiating priest to whom she immediately introduced me.

Mrs. Terasawa had lived her entire life in Higashi Terao, a neighborhood of Tsurumi immediately adjacent to Sōjiji. She was a treasure trove of interesting facts about Yokohama and Tsurumi that one would never find in books. Every day she would walk the two miles from her house to Sōjiji to pay her respects to all of the different beings enshrined on the temple grounds. She would then clean her house from top to bottom, go shopping, prepare meals, and still find time for Baikakō business and *goeika*

practice. For a seventy-three year old woman, it seemed to everyone as if she had an inexhaustible supply of energy.

Sunset

Every August, the Sōjiji community takes a much needed month-long break. While the daily ritual observances continue unabated, temple personnel is dramatically reduced. Since Ōbon is celebrated in August outside of the Kantō region, all of the priests who have temples of their own return to oversee their own parishioners' ritual needs. For the unsui, it is the time between the Summer and Winter cloister periods, and many are recalled back to their home temples to help their fathers and brothers with the rigorous demands of the Ōbon period. For similar reasons, the temple groups take a break as well, allowing members to travel for leisure – common destinations are group tours abroad, or to hot springs in the mountains – or to return to their natal homes elsewhere in Japan for the holiday. The only group that still meets is the Sanzenkai, but weekly attendance is at most a third of what can normally be expected. Even regular daily visitors tend to stay home, or at least avoid the temple during the hottest hours of the day.

The suffocating heat and humidity that dominates the daylight hours makes August a time where one can do little more than rest, relax and recuperate. With so little going on at Sōjiji, I took the time to visit libraries and archives (mercifully air conditioned, of course) and to travel around Japan, visiting temples and sightseeing. A restful two-week trip back to the United States to see family and friends gave me the

inspiration I needed to redouble my research efforts, and I returned to Japan rested and more prepared to work then I had been in months.

When I arrived back at Sōjiji in September, I found that I was on the other side of some mysterious, unspoken test that my informants all seemed to have been putting me through. My research output spiked exponentially as once-recalcitrant informants began to open up to me, and allow me more access to their lives outside the temple. I began to receive invitations to people's homes, to restaurants for dinner, and to private gardens to participate in tea ceremony.

At our first rehearsal back from the break, I notice that Mrs. Terasawa seemed different. She appeared frailer than I ever saw her, and noticeably less vibrant and energetic. She had always been thin, but it was clear from her face that she had lost weight, making her look tired, and old. She stopped wearing her headscarf, revealing for the first time her undyed white hair.

Old. If I didn't know better, I would have thought that she had aged fifteen years in the past month. She moved slowly, taking hesitant steps, and often requiring someone's arm for support. Where she once glowed with contagious energy, Mrs. Terasawa was visibly dimming. Where she once dominated the room, she now seemed to recede into it.

I only saw her once that September, and was surprised to find myself suddenly responsible for my own lunch at rehearsals. None of the other women tried to feed me in her place. Not that I was expecting them to: for the first time since my first rehearsal, I started bringing a bagged lunch with me.

I next saw Mrs. Terasawa in October, at a rehearsal on a rainy and unseasonably chilly day. She announced to the group that she would be taking a leave of absence from the Baikakō until January, to give her legs time to rest and get stronger. While she was not resigning her position as the group secretary, she was delegating responsibility to another senior member of the group.

At lunch, she apologized and told me that I was going to have to fend for myself for food from now on. She told me that she knew she had taken on the responsibility for looking after me, and reassured me that if I'm still around when she comes back, she would bring me food again. Not knowing what to say, but wanting to free her of any feelings of obligation or guilt, I told her that I was grateful for all that she has done for me.

After rehearsal ends, I moved quickly through the temple, stopping in at different departments. By the time I was done, a half-hour had passed. I walked to the main entrance to grab my shoes and my umbrella, where I was surprised to see Mrs. Terasawa and Mrs. Oka still there. Mrs. Terasawa was holding Mrs. Oka's arm to steady herself as she put on her shoes. It had taken her a half hour to walk from the rehearsal room to the temple reception, less than one hundred yards away.

For the first time since I've known her, Mrs. Terasawa was taking the bus home. I took her arm and the three of us begin a slow walk down to Tsurumi Station. The rain has stopped, but I worried that Mrs. Terasawa would not be able to manage the walk down the hill from Sōjiji.

I asked her what was wrong. She told me that her legs had been hurting her, and that she couldn't walk as much as she used to. But the real problem, she said, was that

she just wasn't hungry anymore. She made food for herself and her husband, but she couldn't bring herself to eat. She had lost ten pounds already. I asked if she had been to the doctor. She replied that she hadn't. She didn't want to be a bother.

There was something more, she told me, but I probably wouldn't believe her:

"Everything started after going to a funeral in July," she told me. "One night, I felt a man's hand on my shoulder, pulling me. I looked around, no one was there. I asked myself, 'Was it *hotoke-sama*?' After that, my legs started to hurt, and I wasn't hungry any more.

"The other night, while lying in bed, I saw a flash of light. I remember it was around 10:50, because I looked at the clock. I thought to myself, 'Is this my time? Are they coming for me?'

"Were you afraid?," I asked.

"*Kowaku* nai *yo!*" (I'm *not* afraid!), Mrs. Terasawa emphatically responded. Mrs. Oka echoed that "you really can't be afraid of such things, you know." She said this in a tone that a mother might use with a child.

Mrs. Terasawa said that she knew it is difficult for young people to believe things like this. "My daughter thinks I'm crazy," she added. She described having first felt the presence of the *hotoke-sama* in her teens, protecting her and providing for her in times of distress, especially when she was hungry. She said that young people no longer feel a connection to these things, but she volunteered that unless you experience these things yourself, it's hard to believe.

As we walked down the busy street towards the station, Mrs. Oka asked Mrs. Terasawa if maybe she had missed any annual memorial rites. Mrs. Terasawa conceded

that she missed her father's 27th annual memorial rite in July. She used to go to his grave once a month on his death day (*meinichi*), but she had neglected to go recently on account of her legs. Mrs. Oka suggested that when Mrs. Terasawa was feeling better, she should visit her father's grave, burn incense, and make apologies. "I don't know if it will work," she said, "but that's something that I heard a priest say."

We arrived at Tsurumi Station, and I waved to the driver to hold Mrs. Terasawa's bus. Mrs. Oka and I both waved as she boarded. After the bus departed, Mrs. Oka turned to me and says, "You know, Mrs. Terasawa praises you as if you were her own child."

As I walked home, the rain started up again. I found it curious that Mrs. Oka said "*sayonara*" – goodbye – to Mrs. Terasawa, rather than a more colloquial "*ja, mata ne*" – see you soon. While both were equally common and contextually appropriate, I had been taught in language school that, to the average Japanese, *sayonara* sounds much more distant. And final.

I don't think that Mrs. Oka knew anything that I did not when we watched Mrs. Terasawa's bus pull away from the station. Yet, I cannot help but think that if I had known this send off was the last time I would see Mrs. Terasawa, I would have at least thought of a more appropriate goodbye.

♦♦

As we have seen, a Sōtō Zen temple like Sōjiji caters to many and diverse religious needs. Still, the performance of funerary and memorial rituals remains – as it has for nearly four centuries – the *sine qua non* of Japanese Buddhist practice, regardless of temple or sectarian affiliation. As the Japanese Buddhist clergy struggles to maintain

authority over funerary traditions and practices, so too do parishioners and believers struggle to understand with what is, in many ways, their birthright.

In this concluding chapter, I will look at how death and grief are disciplined in the context of Zen practice, transformed ritually and practically into a story that is less about the ending of life, than it is about the birth and development of a new social person and new social relations. The wake and funeral are critical moments in this new "life" cycle, as they not only establish a new social identity for the deceased, but also work to renegotiate the social relationships in which the deceased was enmeshed in their old lives. This "work" is done through the practice of *kuyō*.

Like *shugyō*, the concept of *kuyō* is difficult to properly convey into a non-Japanese cultural framework. The most common translation found in the Anglophone literature on Japan is "memorial service" (see, for example, Embree 1939: 218; Reader 1991: 91; Rocha 2006: 156). Helen Hardacre translates the term as "rites" (1997: 2), an idea which Marilyn Ivy (1995) expands as "rites aimed at memorializing the dead, rites which aim to pacify the dead by remembering them through offerings, prayers, and recitations of scripture" (145-6). Ellen Schattschneider (2003), echoing Ivy, translates the term as "ancestral memorialization" (49). Stephen Covell (2005) offers two translations: "memorial services" (43) and "rituals for the dead" (208, fn 1). Margaret Lock's (2001) treatment of *kuyō* is perhaps the most specific (and potentially the most problematic) in that she limits her definition of *kuyō* to "a ritual in which [doctors] pray that the souls of the bodies they have dissected may depart peacefully from this world" (213).

Comparing these translations, it might be assumed that the active part of *kuyō* is the act of memorialization; in other words, that there is something about the process of

memory and *remembering* that has operative power in the gradual transformation of the dead from humans to *hotoke* and finally to *senzo*. Certainly, the ways in which the living remember and reimagine the dead are vital part of the ritual efficacy of *kuyō*, but I argue that memorialization is only part of the picture.

For all of its complexity, *kuyō* lends itself to a simpler translation rooted in its own etymology. The word *kuyō* is comprised of two characters: the first character meaning "offering" and the second meaning "nourishment," with the ancillary implication of "to raise or rear" as one would a child. Looking at it in this way, we can see that rather than being an abstract ritual of" memorialization", the practical intention of *kuyō* is to offer nourishment for the transformation of the dead from human to ancestor, in the same way that a parent provides food to a child who cannot fend for itself. I translate *kuyō*, therefore, as an "offering to nourish the spirits of the dead."

Food (and by extension, feeding) is a vital practice by which relationships between social persons are maintained and cultivated. In this regard we should not be surprised to find that the most simple and common manifestations of *kuyō* are, in fact, food offerings: a portion of a meal, a cup of tea, some cookies or sweets, or a favorite alcoholic beverage. Buddhist mythology allows for other interpretations of "food": the story of Mokuren, the disciple of the Buddha who traveled to the Realm of Hungry Ghosts and fed the spirits there, demonstrates that words – specifically the words of a sermon in which the True Dharma is preached – have the power to quench thirst and hunger. Chanting a sutra, or hiring Buddhist clergy to do so, is therefore a powerful act of *kuyō*.

Further, the donation of food to the living (for example, donating foodstuffs to support a community of monastics) can also be performed as *kuyō*, with the karmic merit accrued for the donor being transferred by virtue of a "Transfer of Merit" verse (*ekōmon*) to the ancestors of the donor's family, or to a specific beneficiary indicated by the donor. By logical extension, this "offering of nourishment" extends to all charitable activities, as long as the activity is performed specifically for the benefit of the dead.

The process of learning to "do *kuyō*", I will argue, is as much a cultivation of the living as it is the dead. Moreso than any meditative practice, the clergy of Sōjiji advocate the practice of *kuyō* as being truly transformative for both the living and the dead: activities performed by the living out of gratitude on behalf of the dead renew and reinvigorate the social bonds which death threatened to sever. The dead reap the karmic "merits" of these actions, speeding them along on their transformation towards ancestorhood, while the living gradually move towards a state of selfless grace.

A Time to Mourn

It was Mrs. Otani, one of the women of the Baikakō who worked at Sōjiji, who found me during to tell me that Mrs. Terasawa had died. It was the first night of the December *sesshin*, and we had just finished the evening period of zazen. I was walking back to my room in a fog of exhaustion when I heard her running down the corridor behind me calling my name.

For almost two months, no-one had heard anything from Mrs. Terasawa. Her friends had tried calling her, but her cell phone had been disconnected. Worse, no one

was returning any calls from her house. I knew something was wrong when Mrs. Sakamoto asked *me* if I had heard any news from Mrs. Terasawa.

It was reported to me that Mrs. Terasawa had told Mrs. Sakamoto to tell the Baikakō that she was heading to a hot springs in Shizuoka to help her legs. Instead, she had checked herself into a hospital. Even Mrs. Oka – her best friend – had no idea that anything was amiss.

Wishing to pass from this world with a minimum of fuss is not an uncommon phenomenon in Japan. I imagine it as an extension of everyday culture in Japan in which people will often go to great lengths (and personal trouble) to avoid inconveniencing other people. In fact, the sentiment is common enough to warrant prayer temples called *pokkuri dera* at which the elderly and/or sick can pray for quick deaths in order to minimize the emotional and financial burden placed on family and friends (Reader 1995). In many ways, to die quickly and with minimal inconvenience to others is to die with grace and dignity (Wöss 1993). It is the ultimate "non-imposition."

For the living, however, the news of such a death comes suddenly, and without warning. While the dying may have come to accept their approaching mortality, those who were not privy to the last weeks or days in the life of a friend or loved ones are left to mourn a sudden and tragic loss, as if the person had died suddenly in an accident. The news is shocking and the pain is acute.

I had difficulty processing anything Mrs. Otani said after the sentence, "Mrs. Terasawa has died." The *tsuya*, or wake, would be held at Sōjiji the following evening, with the funeral to take place the day after that. I nodded dumbly and thanked her for coming to find me.

The next hours passed in a haze of numbness. For a long time, I sat alone in the empty, dark lecture hall of the Sanshōkaku, staring at the giant carved statue of Shakyamuni that dominates the stage. The physical and emotional exhaustion of the day helped me to sleep. Early the next morning, I was given permission to leave the sesshin to go back to my apartment and gather more appropriate clothing for the wake and funeral than my zazen attire.

Walking back to Sōjiji from my apartment, I noticed a black and white sign at the temple entrance pointing the way to the "*Terasawa-kei shikijō*," the "ceremony hall" for the Terasawa family. While, out of respect for the family, the sign did not specify what "ceremony" it was for, these signs were nearly always indicators of a funeral. It had not been there when I left.

A truck from a funeral company was parked in front of the Sanshōkaku, and uniformed workers busily moved in and out of the hall. A small booth was set up outside the hall which would later serve as a reception for guests. The canvas tarps which covered the frame of the booth were an alternating pattern of black and white stripes, a somber echo of the celebratory red and white stripes that mark a festive occasion, such as wedding. So, too, was the rush of activity to prepare the hall: folding chairs, tables, flowers, and trays of food all needed to be in place before the guests began to arrive.

The *tsuya* is often considered the most important part of the funerary process, since it is the ceremony that is the most attended by family and guests. The funeral itself (*sōgi*, or *sōshiki*), in contrast, is far more intimate, most often attended only by immediate family and close friends. *Tsuya* can be literally translated as "night of travel." The ceremonies are typically held the evening of the day after death, with the funeral taking

place the following day. At a symbolic level, a *tsuya* is a sending-off party. The deceased is imagined as a traveler, celebrating their last night with family and friends before undertaking a great journey. While sadness is expected, so too are large quantities of food and alcohol. Indeed, feasting alongside the dead is an essential part of the goings-on.

Many of my middle-aged and elderly informants spoke fondly of *tsuya* from when they were younger. Before funeral companies entered the scene, in many regions of Japan funerals were week-long community-wide events that while mournful, were accompanied by feasting and the singing of *goeika* and traditional songs. If the deceased was young, the *tsuya* presented an opportunity for the community to rally together to support the grieving family. If the dead had lived to a healthy old age, the mourning would be a celebration in honor of a life well-lived. In some cases, the worldly wealth of the deceased would be converted into 100-yen coins and thrown to the assembled crowd, to the joy of the children who would scramble to gather as much as they could.

While funerary practices have always varied according to local custom, things have changed dramatically in the past fifty years. Most notably, the increased presence and influence of funeral companies have contributed to a standardization of mourning in Japan. No longer is the *tsuya* or funeral a community-organized event; rather, it has become a ceremonial occasion on par with a wedding, with details and arrangements believed to be best left to professionals. Consequently, the roles of the mourners and guests have also become standardized, with the funeral companies and their affiliates publishing books and videos on "proper" funeral and mourning etiquette and protocol.

Standardization of mourning, however, has not necessarily made things easier for the bereaved. Several informants commented that they believe death has only become

more painful in recent years. As one woman poignantly commented to me, grief is now expected to be funneled into a period of less than forty-eight hours between the death and the funeral. Moreover, the seven weekly rituals that allow for an extended period to come to terms with grief have become "optional," even for the mourning family. One informant suggested a possible explanation for this: there is little opportunity for the funeral companies to profit from these rites, and therefore are not stressed to client families as important.

These changes are generally accepted as a convenience, as the community and mourning family no longer has the time (because of jobs, school and other obligations) to worry about funeral arrangements. One informant was particularly ambivalent about these changes to traditional funerary practices: on the one hand, he blamed the younger generations who no longer take the time to learn from their elders what to do at a wake or a funeral. They expect other people to take care of "traditional matters" for them. Still, he acknowledged the convenience of having a funeral company take care of the many arrangements for a funeral since the bereaved family usually cannot, and local community no longer will.

As a result, a *tsuya* provides a fascinating opportunity to comment on the tug-of-war that takes place between the Buddhist clergy and the funeral companies over the future of Japanese memorial practice. Prior to the post-war period, the Buddhist priest was an instrumental figure in the process of dying: he was called when death was imminent, and it was the Buddhist priest – and not the doctor – who would determine when death had occurred. In the Sōtō Zen sect, once death was determined, a *makuragyō* – "pillow sutra" – was immediately chanted over the deceased, ritually marking their

transition from life to afterlife, and the start of the family's period of mourning and ritual obligations.

Even if the *tsuya* and funeral were held in the home (as they commonly were), the clergy and the temple played a central role in the protracted memorial process. With the shift of the location of death from the home to the hospital in the post-war period, the Buddhist clergy quickly became peripheral to the process of dying (Lock 2002: 216). Rather than being the first to be called in the event of an imminent death, the priest is now often an afterthought. If the family has no ties to a local priest or temple, one is suggested by the funeral company that itself may have been recommended by the hospital.

The result was a double displacement: not only have the clergy been removed from their central role at the bedside of the dying, but they are relegated to the appearance of being employees of the funeral company. In many cases, they actually are (Covell 2008: 316). A corollary effect of this change is that the Buddhist temple appears to many as merely a backdrop for a *tsuya* or funeral, rather than an essential site for the practices which will transform the newly dead into its new life as a *hotoke*.

Waking Mrs. Terasawa

I met up with the Baikakō in Sōjiji's gift shop. Everyone's eyes were red from crying, and conversation was quiet and trivial. When Mrs. Terasawa's name did come up, it was clear that no-one knows what actually happened. There were conflicting reports of Mrs. Terasawa's final days, and no-one was certain if she died alone in her home, or in a hospital with her family. On several occasions, someone's eyes would begin to water.

Before a tear would fall, she excused herself from the conversation to regain her composure. I never actually saw anyone cry.

The Baikakō walked to the first floor of the Sanshōkaku as a group. At the reception outside, guests signed their names in a register, commonly leaving envelopes with money inside, intended to help the family offset the costs of the funeral.[1] People who leave money will receive a receipt which will later be redeemed for a thank-you bag as the visitor leaves. Ordinarily, it would have been Mrs. Terasawa's job to sign the registration book and leave the money envelope on behalf of the Baikakō. In her absence, the responsibility was been delegated to another long-time member, who argued that it is appropriate that we should individually write our names in the guest register. After we had all signed the book, white-gloved attendants from the funeral company sat us in the back of the ceremony hall.

While the deceased in the coffin is obviously the focal point of the ceremony, the most conspicuous feature of the funeral proceedings is the *saidan*, an elaborate multi-tiered wooden altar which dominates the room. The *saidan* is newly constructed for each funeral from fresh cypress wood. Like most trappings of the ceremony, the *saidan* is supplied by the funeral company with the size and intricacy varying by price.

The uppermost tier of the *saidan* held a mortuary photograph (*iei*), with black ribbons adorning the upper left and right corners of the frame. Next to this was a tall plaque that read "*Namu Shakamuni Butsu*", the official invocation of the Sōtō Zen sect. On the tier below the picture sat a temporary paper memorial tablet (*ihai*), upon which

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[1] Donations can be made towards specific funeral costs, such as flower money (*hana dai*), oil money (*abura dai*) and salt money (*shio dai*).

was written Mrs. Terasawa's posthumous name (*kaimyō*). Immediately below this was Mrs. Terasawa's unadorned pine coffin, elevated on wooden supports.

In front of the coffin, an altar was set up, flanked by two low tables. On the far left table sat Mrs. Terasawa's Baikakō *hōgu* – her bells and purple sash, open and arranged for use. Next to these were her glasses. On the far right table were food offerings: a bowl of rice, with chopsticks planted vertically into it; a bowl of dough balls known as *nehan dango*, symbolic of the Buddha's entrance into Nirvana; a bowl of eggs, and a cup of green tea. The center altar was dominated by a sand-filled incense holder, from which lit sticks of incense gave off a steady plume of smoke. The altar also held two Shintō purification wands (*gōhei*), though here with red paper streamers instead of white.

On either side of the *saidan* were arranged layers of identical bunches of chrysanthemum flowers in a mix of white and pastel colors (light blues and purples). In front of each was a tag identifying the party that donated them. The six bouquets of flowers on the highest tier were from the family, with the second tiers holding flowers from friends and various groups to which Mrs. Terasawa belonged, including the Baikakō.

Though simple in construction, each tier of Mrs. Terasawa's *saidan* had large sections of opaque paper, which were lit from behind. The effect of the altar radiating soft light from within was subtle, but magnificent.

Like all of the ritual spaces I have discussed, the room was arranged according to the perspective of the object of veneration, in this case, Mrs. Terasawa's spirit that occupied the *saidan*. From the spirit's perspective, the immediate family was given the place of honor on the left hand side, and the extended family was seated on the right. The area in front of the *saidan* and coffin was an empty space. At the back sat a table of six

incense burners, each with a miniature framed copy of the memorial photograph that sat prominently at the top of the *saidan*. Guests sat behind this table, split into two rows with an aisle running between them for easier access the incense table. Everyone faced inward, towards the empty center of the room, where the officiating priest sat directly in front of the small altar, facing the coffin.

After we are seated, the priest turned to the assembled guests and opened the ceremony with a simple, "Beginning now, we will conduct the *tsuya* ceremony." The priest started with a few words of condolence to the family. Addressing the guests, he took several minutes explaining the significance of the characters which comprise Mrs. Terasawa's new *kaimyō*, the "precepts name" given to the dead.

Like the *anmyō* (refuge name) given to novice clergy priests at their tonsure ceremony, the *kaimyō* marks the recipient as a disciple of the Buddha.[2] As with the former, the bestowing of a *kaimyō* is intended to mark the transition from lay life into the life of the clergy. This distinction might seem strange, as a more applicable transition in this case would seem to be from life to death, rather than from layman to cleric. The reader will remember that the tonsuring ceremony itself marked a significant transition – a social "death" – for the priest. At tonsure, a priest's former pubic identity was ostensibly left behind while the priest – birthed, fed, and clothed by his "Dharma father" – entered into a new set of social relationships and responsibilities. The *kaimyō* operates on the same logic and symbolism: the person lying before you is not dead, but socially

[2] From a theological standpoint, *kaimyō* and *anmyō* are functionally synonymous and interchangeable (Matsumoto 1994: 41). The cultural distinction between the two terms lies in traditional usage: similar to the avoidance of the number 4 (homophonic with "death"), the practice of bestowing *kaimyō* in funerary contexts lead to the word becoming associated with death and mourning. Japanese priests began using "*anmyō*" to refer to their own naming practices seeking to avoid unlucky associations.

transformed. The deceased, like the priest, has died only to their former social lives, not to life itself. They are dead to their lay lives, but are reborn as Buddhist clergy.

The *kaimyō* can vary from a minimum of six characters – in the Sōtō Zen sect, four characters, plus a two character suffix granting the clerical rank of *jōza*, identical to novice clergy – up to twelve characters. Ostensibly, the more "devoted" (*nesshin*) the person was to Buddhism in life, the more characters they will have in their *kaimyō*.[3] Mrs. Terasawa had a ten-character *kaimyō*, a recognition of her many years of contribution to Sōjiji through the Baikakō.

When the priest is finished, the emcee – an employee of the funeral company who manifests over the PA system as a disembodied voice – introduces each participant in the ceremony, beginning with Mrs. Terasawa's husband, who in his role of "chief mourner" (*moshu*) wears a large black and white ribbon on his coat, and the couple's two daughters. As they light incense in front of the coffin, two portable incense burners are passed around to the immediate family and the extended family. As they do so, the priest's attendant begins to chant. When the family has offered incense, the assembled guests are invited to burn incense at the table in the back.

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[3] It is difficult to objectively measure a person's religiosity; it is comparably easier to measure monetary donations. Recent media attention to the practices of bestowing *kaimyō* throughout all sects of Japanese Buddhism have "revealed" a correlation between private donations and the length of a persons' *kaimyō*. These "pay per character" practices were met with public indignation over the perceived exploitation at the hands of unscrupulous clergy who used guilt tactics to make vulnerable families pay for longer names for the sake of their loved ones.

However, it is important to note that the practice of bestowing posthumous names to the laity has nearly always contained an element of privilege and conspicuous consumption. In longer *kaimyō*, the additional characters are used to highlight a person who has made substantial material donations to the Buddhist institution, for example, as a benefactor who provided the monetary backing to establish or rebuild a temple.

That certain members of the clergy have capitalized on a family's vulnerability to guilt them into "purchasing" a longer *kaimyō* for their loved one is an unfortunate outgrowth of this practice. Nevertheless, it should not be forgotten that practice of granting more prestigious *kaimyō* to wealthy patrons of Buddhism is not a recent development.

For an ostensibly Buddhist ritual, it comes as a surprise to hear how very non-standard the *tsuya* liturgy is. It is common practice for Sōtō Zen priests to chant the entirety of the *Shushōgi*, a much-condensed distillation of essential Sōtō Zen teachings. Unlike other Buddhist services, *what* is chanted by the clergy during the *tsuya* is less important than for *how long* it is chanted. The chanting must continue until all guests have had the opportunity to burn incense in honor of the deceased. The five chapters of the *Shushōgi* take about thirty minutes to chant in their entirety, and its duration is sufficient in most cases. However, should the number of guests wishing to pay their respects exceed this duration, a priest has to think on his feet to estimate how much longer the incense offering portion might take. From this guess, he chooses a sutra of appropriate length, with any luck not falling short or extending too far after the last guest offers incense. One priest commented to me that at one *tsuya* he officiated, there were so many guests that he had to start repeating sutra he had already chanted.

Offering incense is done with the highest formality. Guests, standing in *gasshō*, bow first to their right (to the immediate family), then to their left (the extended family), and finally towards the *saidan* in the center. After the guest offers incense, they bow again, this time first towards the *saidan*, and then to the immediate family and the extended family. Even with guests being called up six at a time, the process can be a long one. It takes an hour for all of the guests to pay their respects to Mrs. Terasawa. The process is somber, and by the end the air is heavy and thick with smoke.

When the chant ends, the priest turns to the crowd to deliver a speech that is both a touching eulogy and a moving sermon. In describing her life, the priest talked about how Mrs. Terasawa, as child and then a teenager, grew up quickly during the scarcity and

hardships of Japan's protracted Pacific War, how she survived the devastation of Yokohama, and how she persevered through the poverty and starvation that followed the War. Through it all, she was steadfast in her belief that the *hotoke* would provide for her.

All at once, the significance of what Mrs. Terasawa had told me the last time I saw her swept over me like a wave. I had not put the pieces together earlier – that with only one or two younger exceptions, the Baikakō had experienced their formative years during the worst of the Pacific War. I looked at the elderly women and men of the Baikakō and wondered for the first time how much of their religiosity was due to their age, and how much was owed to the unique experiences their generation shared as children. My eyes landed on Mr. Takeuchi, and I wondered if he and Mrs. Terasawa had ever put aside their personal differences to share their stories (as they had shared with me) of how their devotion to their religion was forged in the same fires of war. Did it sadden them to have had such a close relationship with the *hotoke* over their lifetimes, and to know that their children – and even their clergy – were likely to be unable to understand?

The priest concludes by mentioning an interesting convergence in dates. In life, Mrs. Terasawa's birthday – December 8th – coincides with the Buddhist Jōdō festival, the celebration of the day Shakamuni Buddha became enlightened. The priest suggests that it is auspicious that she died during the Rōhatsu Sesshin, because by passing into death and becoming a *hotoke* (in colloquial Japanese, *hotoke ni naru*) she is now experiencing the same enlightenment as Shakamuni did when he became the Buddha (the original meaning of *hotoke ni naru*). He further points out that Buddhism celebrates the Buddha's birthday, his day of enlightenment, and his death day, all in different months: how auspicious then

the fact that, for Mrs. Terasawa, all three celebrations occur at the same time. As he finishes, he bows in *gasshō*, and the assembled relatives and guests bow in response.

The emcee breaks the silence to say that food will now be served in an adjoining room. The guests are led to the room by the funeral company employees, where there is a feast of food and drink – platters of fried meats and sashimi, and large bottles of sake and beer sit on every table.

The meal is easily the most important part of the *tsuya*, even more so than the previous ritual proceedings. In the pain of loss and haze of tears, it is difficult to remember that the *tsuya* is ostensibly a celebration: not only of the deceased's successful transition from life to new life, but also a celebration of the bonds of affection and relatedness that join all of the assembled participants – family, loved ones and friends – to one another through the deceased. As with other mortuary celebrations throughout the world, eating and drinking with the dead is a vital aspect of the Japanese *tsuya*, because it reaffirms social bonds in the face of severe trauma that would otherwise threaten to sever them. The feasting may start somber – it is difficult not to, given what has taken place over the previous two hours – but the quantities of food and alcohol and the mandate not to restrain themselves give the guests the opportunity to freely share stories and memories with one another. The deceased, who is given a portion of the food and a cup of sake or beer, is a silent participant in all that is taking place. Gazing down from the *saidan*, they are thought to feel fortunate and proud to have the opportunity to generously give to their family and guests one last time.

Proxy

While symbolically the *tsuya* is a farewell gathering, a secondary aspect of the event is that it is the first public appearance of the deceased, who as a *hotoke* now occupies a new category of social person. The deceased has already been given a new name, the *kaimyō* as discussed above. As the physical body is prepared for cremation and burial, the deceased is given a new form – perhaps "presence" might be a better word – in the memorial photograph and memorial tablet, both of which are present on the *saidan* as a proxy for the deceased in the coffin.

The memorial photograph (*iei*) can be either a formal portrait or a snapshot of the deceased in life. Like a passport photo, the photograph chosen is usually one where the person is looking directly into the camera. If part of a larger picture, it is cropped to show only the head and shoulders. A good picture is often preferred over a recent picture – several memorial photographs I saw during my research were clearly taken years before the person passed away. As can be expected, it is sometimes difficult for a grieving family to locate an appropriately flattering picture in the hours immediately following a death. Mrs. Terasawa's family could only find a recent, blurry picture taken on a cell phone to give to the funeral company before the *tsuya*. Before the actual funeral, this picture was replaced by a more formal picture of Mrs. Terasawa wearing her Baikakō regalia, likely taken a decade or so earlier.

The most important characteristic of the memorial photograph is that the person be depicted alone. Any other contextualizing features that may have been in the photograph – for example, landscape or other people – are removed and replaced with a

grey or light blue background.[4] In the memorial photograph, the deceased is both there and not-there: "a photographic print simultaneously evokes presence and absence. It constitutes on the one hand a compact and proximate object, yet it manifestly depicts something separated from the viewer in space and time" (Schattschneider 2003: 204).

During a visit to the home of an informant, I was showed pictures from his wedding. I immediately recognized a family portrait as the source from which his father's memorial photograph – visible from where I was sitting, mounted on the wall over the butsudan – had been taken. While it was undoubtedly a distinguished picture of my informant's father, seeing the two pictures simultaneously was an uncanny experience: in the memorial portrait, gone were the flowers and decorations of the wedding reception hall, and absent were his smiling wife, his newlywed son, and his new daughter-in-law. His picture over the butsudan may be a reminder to the family that the deceased is forever present, and can be interacted with through the butsudan. However, to accomplish this presence, the dead must first be decontextualized to be forever *nowhere.*

Interestingly, this was not always the case. As Yamada (2002) has shown, prior to the end of the nineteenth century, the Japanese commonly produced devotional portraits which depicted the dead in the "other world", surrounded by food, riches, as well as objects (a favorite pipe, or the name plaque of a store) and even people (children or spouses) that defined them in life. Other portraits showed the dead as travelers embarking on a journey, or of Amida Buddha coming to retrieve them to bring them to the Pure Land. By fixing a person into their appearance in life, Yamada argues, it has become difficult for modern Japanese to imagine the dead in an idealized state. With the advent of

[4] All of my questions regarding the memorial picture indicate that the choice of the background color is a matter of preference, and does not constitute any belief as to the qualities of the place where the dead currently resides.

photographic images for memorialization, the emphasis in funerary portraiture shifted from imagining the dead living happily in the "other world" to a freezing of the dead into a permanent state of existential limbo (Yamada 2002: 45).

While the mortuary photograph may fix a person into their form in life, the dead are given a new "body" in the memorial tablet (*ihai*). Modern memorial tablets are usually constructed of black lacquered wood, standing between 13 and 42 centimeters (5 ½ and 16 ½ inches) from base to tip. The style of an *ihai* ranges from the simple to the ornate. Regardless of style, the feature common to all *ihai* is the vertically-standing tablet known as the *fuda*. On *ihai* that are dedicated to an individual, the *kaimyō* is engraved in gilded calligraphy on the front of the tablet, and the age and date of death engraved on the back.

Unlike the memorial photograph which points to one (and only one) person, *ihai* are often shared by two or more individuals. One variation is a wider *fuda* tablet with room for two names to be inscribed side-by-side. These *ihai* are often purchased when one spouse predeceases another, and it is common to see the living spouse's posthumous name engraved in red lettering alongside the gilded name of the spouse that has passed away. (The color red indicates life.) When the living spouse joins their partner in death, the red lettering is replaced with gold characters. Similarly, many households choose to have a communal *ihai* dedicated to the "generations of ancestors of (so-and-so) family" (-*kei senzo daidai*).

While the memorial photograph may allow a person to feel that they are once again looking on the face of their loved one, the *ihai* is often treated in a way that more closely resembles that of a physical body: not only can it be seen, but it can held, spoken

to, cared for, cleaned, and – perhaps most significantly – given nourishment through food offerings. The *ihai* is further given legitimacy as a "second body" through the fact that it must first be activated – that is, awakened – through a special Eye-Opening Ceremony (*kaigen kuyō*). The Eye-Opening Ceremony (which is also performed for Buddhist statuary) transforms an otherwise static object into a *living* focus which with social interactions can take place.

Like a photograph, copies of an *ihai* are often made so that the *ihai* can be simultaneously venerated in multiple places. When before it was common for only the oldest son to take responsibility for the family's memorial rituals, it is not uncommon for all siblings of a generation to want to have a copy of an *ihai* that has been made for their parents. Similarly, many families will entrust their parish temples with a copy of an *ihai*, especially one dedicated to the family's community of ancestors, to ensure that the spirits receive the proper respects every morning. Enshrining an *ihai* at Sōjiji is also possible, but comes with a substantial price tag: permanent enshrinement in the Hōkōdō runs one million yen while, enshrinement in the Daisodō can range from five hundred thousand to three million yen, depending on size of the tablet and desired proximity to the main altar.

Asking an ordinary layperson where the *hotoke* or *senzo* "are"[5] reveals a fascinating number of answers that, while contradictory in theory, fit together without the appearance of contradiction in practice (see Williams 2008). The newly deceased and the ancestors are thought to reside within the family butsudan, where the *ihai* are kept. This answer is complicated by the fact that, as stated above, copies of the same person's *ihai* can simultaneously be kept in multiple places, with the person believed to be "present" in

[5] The Japanese language has two closely-related verbs for "to be." As a rule of thumb, *aru* (有る), is used for non-living objects while *iru* (居る) is used for living things such as people and animals. *Hotoke* and *senzo* are spoken of using the *iru* form, and linguistically demonstrated to be "alive."

each one. No-one I spoke with raised any issues of authenticity or primacy by saying that one *ihai* is more "original" than any other.

Another response is that the dead are said to be present at the family grave, necessitating visitation at least once, and preferably multiple times over the course of the year. In addition to visiting, the family is obliged to keep the area of the grave clean and free from debris, as well as leaving offerings for the ancestors who occupy the gravesite.

A third answer is that the ancestors are on the "other shore" (*higan*), and that they return at set periods of the year, most notably the vernal and autumnal equinoxes (at the festival of Higan, when the equal lengths of day and night allow for easier communication and travel from the "other shore"), at the summer Ōbon festival (where the ancestors are thought to return to their homes), and at the New Year festivities. These periods correspond with spikes in the number of people who go to temples and cemeteries for grave visitations. Again, no-one I spoke with mentioned any contradiction between the belief that the ancestors are always present through the family *butsudan* and the fact that they are thought to "return" at set times of the year.

Yet another answer I heard was that the ancestral spirits live in a Pure Land (*jōdo*) or in a heaven (*tengoku*). These beliefs are not doctrinally a part of Sōtō Zen, which advocates an immediate enlightenment and continued existence in this world. Rather, the availability and incorporation of the ideas of a heaven or the Pure Land is owed to the syncretic nature of Japanese religion. While I have never heard a Sōtō Zen priest make reference to them, their use among the laity likely stems from constant exposure to the teachings and language of other Buddhist sects and religions without sectarian or doctrinal boundaries being made clear.

A fifth answer, and one that has gained particular momentum in recent years, is that the spirits of the deceased are present and manifest in the natural world around the living. This view has taken on remarkable strength since 2007, when the song "Sen no kaze ni natte" (an adaptation of the anonymous American poem "A Thousand Winds") hit the top of the Japanese charts.

Watashi no ohaka no mae de	Please do not cry
Nakanai de kudasai	in front of my grave
Soko ni watashi wa imasen	I am not there,
Nemutte nanka imasen	I do not sleep
Sen no kaze ni natte	I have become a thousand winds
Ano ōki na sora wo	Which blow across
Fukiwatatte imasu	That big sky.
Aki ni wa hikari ni natte	In Autumn, I become the light
Hatake ni furisosogu	which pours onto the fields
Fuyu wa daiya no yō ni	In Winter, I become the snow
Kirameku yuki ni naru	that glitters like diamonds
Asa wa tori ni natte	In the morning, I become the bird
Anata wo mezamesaseru	that wakes you up
Yoru wa hoshi ni natte	In the evening, I become the stars
Anata wo mimamoru	that watch over you
Watashi no ohaka no mae de	Please do not cry
Nakanaide kudasai	in front of my grave
Soko ni watashi wa imasen	I am not there,
Shinde nanka imasen	I did not die

Following its performance by Akikawa Masafumi at the 2006 NHK New Years' Eve music program on NHK, "Sen no kaze ni natte" quickly reached the top of the Japanese charts. Described as "a message from the dead to ease the sadness of loss" (*sōshitsu no kanashimi o iyasu shisha kara no messeji*)[6], the song became a fixture in popular culture, especially as the summer Ōbon period drew near. In particular, the song became the go-to "theme" for TV programs which aimed to show the tenacity of life in the face of death and loss. Not surprisingly, the song also became quickly incorporated

[6] As advertised on the cover of the CD Book "Sen no kaze ni natte" (Arai 2007)

into funeral companies' repertoire. "The only people in Japan who don't like the song," Kodama joked to me, "are grave construction companies (*sekizaiten*)."

Many of the people I spoke with in the latter half of 2007 made explicit reference to the song during conversation and interviews. One man enthusiastically explained to me that the song came closest to describing the true relationship between the living and the dead. This relationship, he believed, had been obscured by conflicting traditions, competing doctrines, and the forces of "Westernization" (*seiyōka*). However, in one move, this song came along to remove the fog and reveal that the *senzo* are still among the living, and watching over them.

Another woman who I met at a public sermon told me that she comes to Sōjiji once a month on behalf of her recently-deceased mother. When I asked her if she was a *danka* of Sōjiji, she said that she wasn't: when her mother passed away, she and her husband didn't see a need to buy a grave for her. Her justification was that the "costs of grave construction are unreasonable," but also unnecessary, as her mother had "become a thousand winds" (*hahaoya wa sen no kaze ni narimashita*). Therefore, she concluded, her monthly visis to Sōjiji provided the same benefits to herself and her mother as if she had visited a physical grave, because her mother's spirit is everywhere.

Sōtō Zen clergy likewise picked up on the potential for capitalizing on the song's popularity. As early as May of 2007, I began hearing references to the song in sermons and lectures. The clergy I spoke with saw the song as an opportunity to reconnect with the laity, who were clearly hungering for a more meaningful relationship with those who they had lost. That the message of the song resonated with Sōtō Zen doctrine about the

immanence of the dead in "this world" was fortuitous.[7] The Sōtō Zen clergy invoked the song's title (but not, to my knowledge, the lyrics) to encourage listener to cultivate a sense of reverence (*sange*) and gratitude for their ancestors and departed loved ones in their daily lives. By extension, the clergy claim, any devotional practice done on their behalf – listening to a sermon, copying sutra, even doing charity – becomes an opportunity for *kuyō* as a kind of grave visitation.

Lastly, it might come as a surprise that I heard virtually nothing regarding reincarnation (*umarekaeri*, or *tenshō*). Especially in the United States and Europe, there is widespread belief that a universal feature of Buddhism is the concept of reincarnation, broadly defined as the migration of the individual essence of a person from one body to another after death. There is some truth to this belief: according to many Buddhist traditions, the original "triumph" of the Buddha's enlightenment was that he discovered a means to sever the ties of karma that kept living beings on the perpetual "wheel" of birth-death-rebirth, an existence which is plagued by never-ending pain and sadness. To enter into *nirvana*, then, is merely to get off of the ride; that is, the goal of ascetic practice was "awakening" to the knowledge of how to avoid future reincarnations. When these awakened beings' earthly forms died, there was no karmic residue to compel them into a future incarnation. Achieving nihility – that is, to be finally free from the pain of eternal rebirth – was conceived as the ultimate goal for all living beings. For those not fortunate to achieve *nirvana* in this life, there was always next time.

As Buddhism traveled throughout Asia, the Buddhist idea of reincarnation was influenced by local beliefs about the afterlife. Though many of the Buddhist texts found

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[7] Though I did not think of it at the time, I would be interested to see how other sects of Japanese religions integrated the popularity of "Sen no kaze ni natte" into their sermons and public messages.

in Japanese Sōtō Zen temples make explicit reference to reincarnation, the concept itself is largely foreign to Japanese tradition. Rather, Japanese custom holds that the newly dead undergo a series of transformations that guide a newly deceased person towards the status of household ancestor. As we will see below, these transformations are facilitated by the living who perform a series of memorial rituals and observances over an extended period of time.

Ultimately, my clerical informants told me, making the effort to disentangle popular and doctrinal notions of where the *hotoke* and *senzo* "are" is missing the point. More important is that the living understand the importance of properly venerating their ancestors through *senzo kuyō*. Whether this act of remembering is done at a temple, at the grave, at the family butsudan, or in honoring the dead in one's daily activities, the *senzo* "are" wherever they are venerated. All of the ritual mortuary trappings are merely representations, stand-ins to help comfort the living by providing physical, tactile reminders of their presence. "The dead," Kawase told me, "do not have need for such things."

Still, the fear of becoming a *muen botoke*, literally a "spirit with no attachments", remains culturally significant. According to Buddhist cosmology (itself a syncretic mix of Indian, Chinese and Japanese cultural influences), a soul that does not receive regular care from its descendants in the form of *kuyō* will be doomed to wander the earth for eternity, quickly descending into madness and becoming a destructive force that seeks vengeance on the living. A person or family that falls into sickness, tragedy, or financial misfortune is often asked if perhaps they have an ancestor that has been neglected.

For many – especially the parents of the post-war Baby Boom generation – the possibility of having their souls go neglected and unnourished is a substantial concern, and many go to great lengths to avoid this fate (see also Rowe 2004). I spoke with several parishioners of Sōjiji who were vocal about their unwillingness to risk their afterlife on the uncertain guarantee that their descendants will properly care for them. Instead, they made financial plans to cover the costs of regular *kuyō* by the clergy of Sōjiji and the administration fees for their grave into the foreseeable future. This was most often done as a provision in their last wills, though I have also heard of wealthy and/or financially savvy parishioners establishing an endowment fund in trust, the interest from which will cover the necessary costs in perpetuity.

Others whose fortunes are more modest find themselves with limited options. One man told me with regret that his choice not to have children to further his career seemed like a good idea when he was younger. Now that he is in his seventies, he spends much of his time worrying about what will happen to his soul with no-one to visit his grave and properly care for him. He has thought about the possibility of buying into Sōjiji's communal "grave for perpetuity" (*eidai gōsō haka*) so at least the clergy will visit and care for him. However, he finds the prospect of not being buried with his ancestors and abandoning them to neglect while he receives care equally as troubling.

Not everyone faces this possibility with trepidation. The above informant's friend, who was sitting with us, encouraged him to take a more pragmatic approach. "You're dead. There is nothing you can do. What's the point of being afraid?," he asked his friend. The first man shrugged, and his friend continued: "If you don't have children to care for

you, well, your spirit has left your body anyway. I don't think there's anything to worry about."

Farewell

The funeral proper is held the day after the *tsuya*. At Sōjiji, the funeral service is often held in the same space as the *tsuya*, with the body having been left overnight, attended by two monks. At Sōjiji, the bereaved families are often offered guest rooms in the Sanshōkaku, especially if they are coming from out of town.

Mrs. Terasawa's funeral has only a fraction of the attendees of the *tsuya*, and the majority present are her immediate and extended family. Attending the *tsuya* satisfies the social responsibilities of friends and acquaintances, many of whom have jobs or other daytime obligations that would prevent them from attending the funeral. I was surprised to find that even the Baikakō is at half-strength at the funeral, with attending members giving explanations for the absences of those who could not be there.

Modern Zen fundamentalists and revivalists often appeal to an original "pure Zen" that is free from popular ritual practices such as funerals and memorial services. These ritual practices are often viewed as "contaminations" to the purity of Zen, or more generally, Buddhist teachings: as one clerical informant asked rhetorically, "the Buddha never performed a funeral, so why should we?"

However, it is difficult to underemphasize the significance that lay funerals have played in the establishment and development of Sōtō Zen in Japan since the medieval period. As William Bodiford (1992, 1993) has shown, medieval Sōtō Zen priests –

beginning with Dōgen himself, and reaching its full potential with the itinerant and charismatic priests of Gasan's line affiliated with Sōjiji – pioneered the use of Buddhist funerals for the laity. The Sōtō Zen funeral was based on the model used by Chinese monastics for clerical funerals; its adaptation for use with the laity was a uniquely Japanese innovation (Bodiford 1993: 195). While the actual funerals themselves were influenced by local customs, that these customs were situated within the framework of the characteristically Sōtō Zen funeral ritual was a clear demonstration of a burgeoning sectarian identity. The widespread popularity and appeal of the Sōtō Zen funeral was such that competing Buddhist sects used the Sōtō Zen model for their own sectarian funerals. In the intervening centuries, what had begun as a characteristically Sōtō Zen practice became the foundation for modern Japanese funerary practice (Williams 2005 and 2008; Walker 2008).

The most characteristic feature of the Sōtō Zen funeral liturgy is that it is less a ceremony of memorialization than it is an abbreviated tonsure ceremony marking the transition from lay to clerical status. The funeral liturgy is relatively short, taking less than twenty minutes in its entirety. Mrs. Terasawa's funeral followed this pattern.

After some preliminary comments, the priest began with the tonsure (*teihatsu*) itself. Unlike a "living" ordination, the priest will not shave the entirety of the head, but will symbolically shave only the forelock. The priest chants the "shaving verse" three times, and then reached into the coffin to shave Mrs. Terasawa's forelock using a straight-edge razor. Though we couldn't see what was happening, the familiar wooshing sound of the razorblade scraping hair was picked up by the microphone attached to the

priest's collar. One of the Baikakō women sitting next to me leans over to whisper "*atama*" (head).

The tonsure is followed by the Precepts ceremony (*jukai*), during which the deceased will silently take refuge in the Three Jewels of the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha, and accept the Three Pure Precepts and the Ten Prohibitions. After each vow, the priest clacks two lacquered pieces of wood together, so that the ordinand does not forget her monastic precepts.

After the precepts are bestowed, the priest chants the *nenju*, an invocation of the ten names of the Buddha. The *nenju* is a common feature of monastic practice and is recited twice daily as part of the mealtime liturgy. From a doctrinal perspective, the *nenju* invocation is thought to operate in the same "disciplining" manner as *goeika*: the body is held in *gasshō*, the position of gratitude and humility; the voice, chanting the Buddha's names, acknowledges the truth of the impermanence of the world. Performing these bodily actions, it is believed, naturally disciplines the mind to deeply comprehend the fleeting nature of the world, and to be thankful for one's time on Earth. Though it is never made explicit to the audience – I had to ask after the fact – this simple invocation is a demonstration of the immanence of *satori*: both the intonations of the priest and the silence of the deceased are proof of the enlightenment that both share.

The final liturgical aspect of the funeral is the *indō hōgō*, or sermon for the deceased. This sermon was not so much a eulogy than it is a report of the events in Mrs. Terasawa's life, though it contained much of the same information. In many ways, it was a final reckoning of the social person that was Mrs. Terasawa, who being newly-ordained, now sat as witness to the events of her own former life. The priest bestowed upon her the

kechimyaku genealogical chart that is given to all Sōtō Zen clerical initiates, which placed her – now known by her new *kaimyō* – into the lineage of the Buddhist patriarchs descending from Shakamuni Buddha himself, with a line drawn between her and the Buddha to close the circle. The priest placed the *kechimyaku* into the coffin. It will be consumed with her during her cremation.

When the Buddhist liturgy is completed, the funeral company workers invited those sitting in the rear of the room to offer incense to Mrs. Terasawa, now a newly-ordained Buddhist nun. One by one, we offered pinches of incense to the burners. I noticed that the memorial pictures of Mrs. Terasawa had been replaced by a more flattering portrait – she looked at least ten years younger, full of vibrancy and life. In the picture, she was wearing her Baikakō robes.

We returned to our seats while the room was rearranged. All of the chairs flanking the coffin were removed, and the coffin was moved from under the *saidan* towards the center of the room. The lid was fully removed.

As the assembly gathered around the coffin, the priest's assistant began to sing a haunting performance of the newly-published *Shinmō Shōrei Kuyō Gowasan*. Though the Baikakō had practiced this song, this was the first time that anyone had ever heard it in its proper context, not at a rehearsal, but at a funeral:

Towa no inochi to negae domo	Even though we ask for everlasting life
Mujō no kaze ni sasowarete	We are compelled by the winds of impermanence.
Oshimite chireru hana nareba	While we reluctantly scatter flowers
Wakare no namida haha tsutau.	The tears of separation roll down our cheeks.

As the assistant sand, the assembled guests were handed bunches of cut flowers. We were told not to worry, as there are plenty. One by one, the guests proceeded to place the flowers in the open coffin, covering Mrs. Terasawa's body.

This was the moment that the reality set in for most people. At once, the sounds and sights of grief filled the room. Mrs. Terasawa's husband sat in a chair with tears streaming down his face. One of her two daughters cried at the front of the coffin, holding onto it for stability, wailing loudly. Mrs. Sakamoto stood on the other side, crying and caressing Mrs. Terasawa's face. She was gently led away by an attendant to make room for other mourners to make their final goodbyes.

The family was handed origami cranes in a rainbow of colors, which were added to the flowers in the coffin. Finally, the immediate family was given large chrysanthemums – *kiku no hana*[8] – to place around Mrs. Terasawa's face. Her husband lovingly touched her face one last time as he placed his.

The emcee introduced Mrs. Terasawa's younger brother, who spoke on behalf of the family. He described in detail her deterioration over the past three months, starting with the weakness in her legs, her loss of appetite, and the stroke which finally claimed her. She had been in the hospital since October, but she had been clinging to life in order to see her birthday and her granddaughter's wedding – both only a week away.

After he finished, the attendants bought the coffin lid to be placed back on the open casket. At this point, Mrs. Terasawa's eldest daughter became hysterical, wailing, "*Iya da yo! Iya da yo!*" (Stop it! Stop it!), and moved to prevent the attendants from placing the lid on the coffin. She was firmly held by her husband, but there was a sense that she was giving voice to the anguish shared by the assembly of guests, all of whom

[8] The homophonic relationship between the noun *kiku*, "chrysanthemum" and the verb *kiku*, "to hear", is very interesting. Chrysanthemums are said to be able to facilitate communication between the newly deceased and the living by permitting both sides to "hear" the other. After a funeral, chrysanthemums are placed on the household butsudan from where they serve as communicative devices that connect with the chrysanthemums that were placed in the coffin. In so doing, the dead can still hear what is going on in the home, and the family – ostensibly – can hear the voice of their departed loved one.

were openly sobbing. Even stoic Mr. Takeuchi was red-eyed, struggling to hold back his tears.

When the coffin lid was placed, the funeral attendants asked everyone to gather in front of the Sanshōkaku to send off Mrs. Terasawa's body. As we were leaving, "Sen no kaze ne natte" began playing over the PA system. I took Mrs. Sakamoto's arm and slowly walked with her out into the cold December rain to stand together with the Baikakō.

Three busses were lined up in front of an ornately decorated hearse. These busses would take only family to the crematorium; while friends are not specifically prohibited from attending the cremation, by custom, the cremation is a private, family affair.

When everyone was lined up, Mrs. Terasawa's coffin was carefully carried out of the hall by six pallbearers – a delicate task, as the coffin had no handles. The coffin was placed into the hearse feet first, and the doors are closed and locked. The driver bowed to the coffin in the hearse, bowed to us, and led Mrs. Terasawa's husband to the passenger side of the hearse, where he would travel with the body. There was another round of heavy crying.

Mrs. Terasawa's two daughters thanked the assembled guests profusely with deep bows, and thanking us for taking the trouble to come out in such bad weather. The family boarded the waiting busses, and very soon the funeral procession was on its way. One by one, the vehicles circled the roundabout. The Baikakō bowsed in gasshō as a final salute to Mrs. Terasawa. As the hearse passed Sōjiji's gate and out of sight, Mrs. Oka tearfully said, "*Sayonara, Terasawa-san. Tengoku ni mata aimashō.*"

Goodbye, Mrs. Terasawa. May we meet again in Heaven.

Cultivating Life

It is unreasonable to expect either the intense grief of loss or the disruption of the social fabric caused by death to be resolved at the end of funeral, no matter how "affirming" the message of the clergy. Despite the claims of the medieval Sōtō Zen priests that they could bestow immediate enlightenment – and thus salvation – upon the dead, this innovation was never able to trump the traditional Japanese belief that a newly-dead spirit must undergo a process of maturation before it could be counted among the generations of tutelary household ancestors. Rather than being an endpoint, the *tsuya* and the funeral lay the groundwork for all future social interactions between the living and the dead.

The logic of *kuyō* is steeped in Confucian notions of filial piety that became intertwined with Buddhist cosmology and, later, with Japanese folk practices. In an idealized parent-child relationship, parents make sacrifices to provide food, clothing, shelter, and education to bring a child safely from dependence through adulthood. Moreover, children would not even be alive in the first place were it not for their parents. This gift of life, and the years of care that parents give to their offspring result in an impossible "debt" (*on*) being placed on the shoulders of the children. As parents age and return to a state of dependency, children are obliged to attempt to "repay" (*hōon*) the infinite debt that they accrued from being the recipients of life and care (Lancaster 1984: 141). While caring for one's parents is relatively straightforward while they are alive, children are obliged to return the care for their parents in perpetuity after death (Davis 1989: 307).

The transformation from human to *hotoke* to ancestor is a long process, requiring attentive care and nourishment over a period of years and decades. More importantly, this process is not *automatic*, in the same way that a child becoming an adult is not automatic. In this regard, the process of performing *kuyō* mirrors that of providing care for a child from birth through adolescence and finally into a productive (and reproductive) adulthood.

The first forty-nine days after death are traditionally considered to be the most critical time for the establishment of this new relationship. Mourners are expected to observe seven weekly memorial rites at their parish temple, each representing a different stage in the transformation of the dead from the newly deceased (*shinmō*) to an enlightened *hotoke*.

Following the cremation ceremony, the ashes are taken home in a white brocaded reliquary box to be placed on the household butsudan, where, like a newborn child, they are expected to be cared for around the clock with offerings of food, flowers, incense, and sutra recitations.[9] The *ihai* with the deceased's new name is placed on the butsudan, and the mortuary photograph is hung above the cabinet.

By the second week, the temporary *ihai* that was used in the funeral is replaced with a permanent lacquered *ihai* which is then "awoken" in an Eye Opening Ceremony. After the fifth week, the ashes will be placed in their final resting place, either buried in a permanent cemetery plot or disposed of in some other manner.

The forty-ninth day is known as the *Nehan no Hi* (Day of Nirvana), or more formally, the *Dairenki*. At this point, the deceased are thought to be fully stabilized in

[9] If the family cannot, or is unwilling, to keep the ashes, I was told that the reliquary could be left with a temple priest who will give them the appropriate care.

their new form as *hotoke*, having attained the full enlightenment of the Buddha. In many ways, the *Nehan no Hi* echoes the custom of shrine visitation in which Japanese newborns are "presented" at a local Shintō shrine approximately a month after birth (Hendry 2000: 134), when an infant's soul is thought to be securely attached its new body. Though solemn, the *Nehan no Hi* is an occasion for a modicum of celebration. Following the memorial ceremony, the family usually gathers together for a communal meal – often a catered meal in a restaurant or in the home – in recognition of an important transition point for both the dead and the living.

Reflecting back on his time in mourning, one informant told me that the first week was the hardest, but as each of the seven weekly rituals were conducted, the pain of loss gradually eased. Still, the *Nehan no Hi* isn't a "celebration," he explained, because no one can be said to be "happy." "The priest explained to us that my grandfather had attained enlightenment like the Buddha," he told me, "but that didn't make any of us feel better. We were still sad that our grandfather had died."

After the seven-week mourning period ends, the next major event comes at the first anniversary of death. According to custom, families are expected to mourn for an entire year, with the living entering into mourning (*mochū*) at the moment a family member dies. An announcement to this effect is posted outside the front gate of the mourner's house, and for the next year, the mourning family is supposed to act and dress somberly. One informant elaborated on this to explain that events like parties, vacations, and social gatherings should be cancelled, and even obligations like writing celebratory New Year's cards should be avoided.

Traditionally, the end of mourning on the first anniversary of death is considered a celebration, since it is from this point on that the living are again allowed to "enjoy" life. Again, the family gathers for a memorial ceremony at a temple, and afterwards for a communal meal in honor of the dead. From this point forward, memorial observation for the dead falls less under the authority of the temple and priest, than it does the particularities of household custom and practice.

How meaningful or frequent these offerings are depends, of course, on the person or family in question. Far and away the most common practice is the offering of food on the butsudan. Many of my informants reported interacting with their ancestors enshrined on the family butsudan in their home at least once a day, usually at mealtimes. The daily ritual, as it was described to me, is simple: a family member (most often a woman) will place a bowl of rice or a cup of tea on the butsudan, light a candle, ring a small bell, place their hands in *gasshō* and bow their heads. While I expected this ritual of offering to be short, I was amazed to see how short it could be: visiting the home of one family, I saw the entire thing done in literally twenty seconds.

Individuals or families may observe the deceased's monthly or annual "death days" (*meinichi*) – literally, "day of life" – with practices such as grave visitation, offerings of the deceased's favorite food or drink, donations to a temple or other charitable organization, or even with "ascetic" practices such as sutra copying and chanting. One person I spoke with told me that every month on the day his mother died, he forgoes cigarettes and alcohol, drinks only miso soup, and chants the Heart Sutra thirty-three times. While this particular individual's practice is unique and even extreme

when compared to more common Japanese memorial observations, it provides an example of the range of activities that can comprise the practice of *kuyō*.

While the Sōtō Zen clergy encourage the performance of *kuyō* in one's everyday life according to one's own ability and preferences, there are important ritual moments when believers and parishioners are encouraged to seek the services of the clergy and a temple.

The most common periods for employing the clergy are during the four seasonal festival periods: the two equinoctial Higan celebrations (March and September), the summer Ōbon festival (July), and the winter New Year's celebration (January). During these periods, the normally tranquil garden bursts with foot and motor traffic as parishioners swarm to Sōjiji en masse to visit their family graves. Families have the option of participating and paying to have their names read as "donors" during the *Sejiki* ceremonies that are scheduled daily to correspond with these periods. The *Sejiki* ceremony aims to feed wandering hungry ghosts through offerings of rice, water, and the sating power of the Dharma. By donating to this cause, living donors accrue karmic merit that the clergy redirects to the benefits of the deceased. The *Sejiki* ceremonies at Sōjiji are well advertised in advance, and often draw more than five hundred lay participants on the busiest days.

Less regular are the semi-annual memorial rites known as *onki*. These ceremonies take place on the first, third, seventh, thirteenth, seventeenth, twenty-third, twenty-seventh, and thirty-third anniversaries of a person's death.[10] The Sōtō Zen sect considers a *hotoke* to have officially entered the nameless generations of household ancestors after

[10] Fiftieth and hundredth anniversaries (and multiples thereof, i.e. 150, 200, etc.) are also celebrated, though they are usually reserved for famous or historic figures such as influential Sōtō Zen masters.

the thirty-third anniversary of death, freeing the descendants from memorial obligations specific to that individual. Be that as it may, in common practice it is rare for a parishioner household to continue to observe – that is, pay for – memorial rites requiring a temple and clergy past the thirteenth anniversary.

Nevertheless, Sōjiji generates a substantial portion of its yearly income through the performance of these ceremonies, more so than the annual dues of its parishioner households. As a result, much of the temple's efforts go towards accommodating parishioner requests for the performance of memorial ceremonies, referred to generically as *senzo kuyō*.

In a temple of five thousand parishioners, it is instructive to see how the clergy of Sōjiji attempt to maintain mechanical efficiency and speed while working to avoid the appearance of doing precisely that. While families dressed in black mourning clothing are a common sight in Sōjiji's halls any day of the week, it is of course the weekend that sees the most activity. In order to accommodate the high demand for the performance of memorial rituals, morning and afternoon sessions of two hours each are held simultaneously in both the Daisodō and the Hōkōdō on Saturday and Sunday, allowing Sōjiji to minister to upwards of sixty families each weekend. Simple math shows that in order to keep this pace, the temple clergy must be able to minister to two families every fifteen minutes.

Families are greeted at the reception desk by a monk who will serve as their guide through the temple and through the ritual protocol of the ceremonies, which the laity are not expected to know. Their monk leads the family to the fourth floor of the Sanshōkaku, where rows of long tables are arranged throughout the hall. Here, the families are served

tea and cookies while they wait for their turn. A higher-ranking priest from the temple will come to each table in turn to speak with the family, adding a human and compassionate face to what might seem to be an impersonal process.

About a half hour before the family's ceremony is scheduled to begin, their escort monk guides the family through the temple to the appropriate hall. In the back of the hall, a red carpet is set up, split in two by a low wooden barricade that can only be described as a fence. On the left side of this fence sits the family for whom the ceremony is currently being conducted. On the right side sits the family who is "on deck," next in line for the ceremony. The family on the right moves to the left when the current ceremony ends, and the next family is brought in to take their place. The family whose ceremony has just ended is led out of the hall.

While this transition is taking place, a "stage crew" of monks prepares the main altar for the new family. The lights over the altar are turned off while the monks work, speedily replacing one family's offerings of foodstuffs and flowers on the altar with those from the next. If the family brought a mortuary photograph with them, this is placed on the altar as well. Fresh candles are placed on the altar and lit, and a new stick of lit incense is placed in the burner. The movements of the stage crew are precise and efficient, and the transition from one family to another takes less than three minutes. When the transfer is complete, the lights are turned back on.

As the altar is prepared, the officiant and the assembly of unsui sit quietly, facing the center of the hall. The officiant sits on a lacquered throne in the center of the hall; he

is flanked on both sides by the assembly of unsui, two rows to a side, fifty monks in total.[11]

In contrast to the unsui who are dressed in their uniform black robes, the officiant wears richly embroidered golden-yellow vestments and miter, and carries the tasseled *nioi* scepter of a ranking priest. That the officiant wears fine clothing is considered to be a display of respect to the sponsoring family, rather than a conspicuous show of wealth. Ironically, however, this fact is seldom explained to the family. On several occasions, I heard people ask whether the officiant was the abbot of the temple. (It was not.) One person I spoke with actually came away with the opposite message: he perceived the officiant's display as evidence that his donations were going to the well-being of the clergy, rather than to the benefit of his ancestors.

The *senzo kuyō* ceremonies are remarkably similar, and surprisingly brief. The ceremony space is opened with a crash from the large bell, and the unsui stand. After brief words of benediction from the officiant, the cantor calls a chant, most regularly something short like the *Daihi Shin Darani.* As the monks chant, they ambulate through the inner hall in a modified figure-eight path. After they have returned to their places, but while the chanting continues, the family's escort monk leads the family to the altar, where they offer two pinches of incense, and then bow in gasshō. They are led back to their seats. When the chant ends, the officiant announces the name of the donor family, the purpose of the offering (most often simply "for the purposes of *senzo kuyō*"), and recites the Transfer of Merit verse that transfers to the dead the karmic merit accrued by hiring the clergy to chant scripture. With a final bow, the ceremony ends.

[11] This is assuming that the ceremony is held in the Daisodō. The Hōkōdō can only accommodate between twelve and twenty monks.

Again, the stage crew whirrs into action, turning the lights off, and resetting the altar for the next family. If all has gone well, the ritual – from set up to close – has taken fewer than fifteen minutes. On good days, the number is closer to twelve minutes, all told.

Given the importance of the *senzo kuyō* rituals to the financial well-being of the temple, as well as the speed and efficiency by which these rituals are performed, is perhaps all too easy to give in to the perception that Japanese Buddhist temples – even a training temple like Sōjiji – are in the "business" of grief. The on-going criticism of the Buddhist institution as parasitic and opportunistic is echoed in the comments of the disgruntled parishioner. A more skeptical Japanese critic may comment that a funeral, or a year of mourning observances, or thirty-three years of memorial observances have no soteriological value; that they are merely tools – invented by the Buddhist institution, and increasingly the provenance of the funeral industry – of keeping customers paying in perpetuity.

Ultimately, the question must be asked: who is *kuyō* for? The dead, or the living?

Facing Death

The day following Mrs. Terasawa's funeral, I was still emotionally raw and had difficulty concentrating. I could have left the *sesshin* and gone home. I told myself that I was staying out of a sense of duty, of "giving my all." In reality, I stayed at Sōjiji because didn't want to be by myself. In the silence of the dark, cold Sōdō, I realized how lonely and solitary zazen could be.

I tried to let my eyes soften, but scenes from Mrs. Terasawa's wake and funeral kept playing out on the wall in front of me. The scent of incense being burned in the inner hall returned me to the funeral, standing with the Baikakō as we offered of incense in front of Mrs. Terasawa's memorial photograph. Looking at Mrs. Terasawa's picture, divorced from any living context, I remember thinking what a haunting metaphor the memorial photograph is: that the dead are taken out of the world they lived in, to exist by themselves in a grey or blue nowhere.

In the silence of the hall, I heard the sobs of Mrs. Terasawa's family as they surrounded her with flowers in her coffin. I didn't place a flower. I couldn't do it. I couldn't bear the thought of seeing the woman who had so generously cared for me laying there, disappearing forever under the layers of flowers, gently placed by those who loved her.

In my head, I heard Mrs. Terasawa's daughter cry in anguish as the funeral workers affixed the lid of the coffin. My heart broke again as I heard her cry, "*Okaasan, iya da! Iya da yo!*"

All at once, I remembered a question Mrs. Terasawa had asked me months earlier while riding the train back from a trip to Saitama.

"When you do zazen, do you see things?," she had asked me.

I thought she was being metaphorical: "Of course I see things," I said to her, "I think of all of the things that I have to do, all of the things I'd rather be doing. Images and feelings pop into your head, but learning to let them go is part of zazen."

"No, no," she corrected me. "Do you *see* things? Like spirits or ghosts?"

I hesitated in answering. "No, I don't see things like that."

“I do,” she told me. “That’s why I don’t do zazen. When I stare at the wall, I see ghosts of dead people, people who are asking for help. I tried zazen once with the Baikakō, but I couldn’t handle it. It hurt so much to see those faces. I never did zazen again.”

Only now did I understand what she was asking. As I stared at the Sōdō wall, all I could picture in my mind was Mrs. Terasawa’s face as she lay in her coffin. It was too much for me. Holding in tears, I bowed to the wall, stood up, and quickly ran from the Monk’s Hall to a secret corner of the temple from where I could cry and stare out of a window. I marveled that even on a cold December morning, Sōjiji’s garden is green. Even in winter, the temple is vibrant.

I collected myself and rejoined the group in the lecture hall before the start of the morning sermon. The unsui file in as a group, exhaustion clearly written on their faces.

Yamadera-rōshi was speaking that morning. I had my notebook open and ready to take notes, but I stared past him, gazing at the statue of Shakyamuni that dominates the stage behind him. Occasionally, I looked over to the unsui sitting on the other side of the hall. I saw only one or two awake. The rest sat with their shoulders slumped over, and their heads bowed in a way that one might mistake for deep concentration on their notes in front of them. I was impressed with their ability to sleep without falling over.

All of a sudden, Yamadera-rōshi’s voice broke my trance:

“It is natural for people to try to avoid death. We go to great lengths not to think about it. In hospitals, we avoid the number four because we say it doesn’t sound ‘pleasant’. We’re not afraid of the number four. We’re afraid of death.

"How many times have we heard people say that Buddhist temples are 'gloomy' (*kurai*) and 'dangerous' (*abunai*) places? When they visit a temple it seems to them that it is a place where people go only when someone dies.

"Furthermore, people don't like hearing sutras. Sutras are the words of the Buddha. They are *good* things! But the average person doesn't think about that. All they can think when they hear chanting is a funeral.

"In previous times, a Buddhist priest was the one to sit with the dying person to comfort them and their family. Only the priest could say when death had occurred, because the priest had to release their spirit from the body. Now priests are only called after the death takes place. Sometimes, we're even accused of getting there too late!

"When people see priests only at funerals, they come to associate Buddhism with death. They don't respect priests, because they think they should avoid you. But ask those same people who they want to perform their funeral, and most will respond that they want 'a priest who practices *shugyō*' (*shugyō shite iru sō*). So they're not afraid of the priest. They're afraid of death.

"Just like the sunlight, humans can't look for too long at death – it hurts too much. But we [priests] have to learn to face death (*shi o mitsumeru*). We have a responsibility to provide comfort in the face of death.

"You *will* encounter death. This is certain. There is no perfect world where death doesn't exist. This is the meaning of impermanence. But the lesson of *shugyō* is that life exists in this moment – now, here."

Ima, koko. ("Now, here.") Yamadera-rōshi punctuates his words by waving his hand vertically on "now" and horizontally on "here". Out of context, his gesture might be mistaken for the sign of the Cross.

"Each of us is fortunate to encounter other people in the world, in every moment of our lives. When a person dies, we perform *kuyō* for them to show our gratitude for the blessing of meeting that person and knowing them in life.

"If you don't understand this, then you can't share it with the people who need to hear it most."

I looked over to the sleeping unsui and wonder how many in the room are listening to what he is saying. How many times have they heard this speech, or one like it? How many times have *I* heard this speech? Was it only this morning – in this mourning – that I was finally awake enough to hear?

I was not the only one moved by Yamadera-rōshi's sermon. Later on that day, another sesshin participant stopped me in the stairwell to ask me if I had ever gone to *dokusan*, a private interview with one of the masters where a student is encouraged to ask questions to deepen their understanding of their *shugyō*.

I told her that I had not. She said that she wanted to ask someone about the compatibility of different religions, but didn't know if this is an inappropriate question. Her family belongs to the Rinzai Zen sect, she said, and she thinks it's important to give them the appropriate funeral. At the same time, she couldn't stop thinking about Yamadera-rōshi's words. "Sōtō-shū really sounds like it cares about people," she told me. "I know my family is Rinzai, but maybe Sōtō is the right answer for me?" She decided

that the question she wants to ask is whether she can be both Rinzai and Sōtō at the same time.

At the evening zazen session, a bell is rung seven times to announce that the master is ready to receive visitors. I bowed to the wall, slipped on my shoes, and quickly left the hall. I was directed by hall monitors to the room that is used as the Tanga-ryō, now repurposed as a waiting room. There was a red carpet on the floor, which served as a queue for those waiting to see the master. I was third in line.

We are each handed a piece of paper giving detailed directions for entering the master's room and asking your question. It occurred to me that most of the unsui have never done this before either.

After waiting in silence, my turn came. Outside the master's room, I heard the ring of a small handbell. I struck the bell that is waiting outside, asking permission to enter. I heard the handbell ring again – permission granted.

From a kneeling position, I opened the sliding door into the room where the rōshi is waiting. The room itself was small, with fluorescent light illuminating only the front half of the room. Yamadera-rōshi was sitting in the darkened half of the room, almost completely enveloped in shadow. A low table with flowers, incense and the small handbell sat in front of him. In his hands, he was holding a *kyōsaku*. We were both surprised to see the other.

I bowed and made a full prostration on the floor. As I try to stand up, I forgot that I was wearing my *hakama* skirt low to keep my feet covered and warm during zazen. Unaccustomed to the length, I stepped on the back hem and lost my balance, falling

squarely on my behind. He laughed at my display and waved me over, telling me not to worry about protocol.

I nervously walked towards him and, as instructed, I raised my hands in *gasshō* before I speak: "Yesterday, I was at the funeral of someone who was very important to me. Today, I can't think and I can't concentrate. When I try to sit zazen, all I can see is her face in the coffin. At today's sermon, you said that we have to learn to face death – but I don't know how to do this."

A look of sympathy crossed his face. "You must mean Mrs. Terasawa. It really was a shame, wasn't it? Ordinarily, I would have gone to pay my respects. Because it is the *sesshin*, I was only able to send a representative. Please sit."

I nodded and thanked him. Watching my footing, I knelt in *seiza* in front of him. "How old are you?", he asked. "Thirty-five?"

I told him that I'm twenty-eight.

He laughed. "You're young! Well, if you're lucky, it's not really something you think about until you're sixty or so. But then, people start thinking about their own death, and they begin to worry about how they are going to die.

"Compassion for human beings is the kind of feeling that I try to instill in the unsui, but they're like you: they're too young to understand. Most of them still have their parents, and grandparents too. They've heard of death, but they have no experience of it. But a priest needs to be able to connect with his parishioners – and those who have died – on a human level. When you do your morning rituals, a priest always has to remember that the names you're reading are not just names. Each one of them is a human being.

"Nowadays, the unsui think that when they are done at Sōjiji, they'll go to work for their fathers. 'One day,' they think, 'I'll inherit a temple with a lot of *danka*,' and that they'll never have any problems. That may have been true fifty or a hundred years ago. But it isn't true anymore, and won't be true in the future. The unsui today are going to have to work hard just to maintain what they have.

"I didn't inherit my temple. My father was a priest, but I'm the third son." He pinched his *kesa*. "All he gave me were these robes. Even if there was a second temple in the family, my older brothers were ahead of me in line.

"It took twenty years of teaching for me to be offered my own temple. The temple I was given was in the countryside, and was very poor. When I started, I had sixty parishioner families. Now, I have four hundred.

"There's no secret to what I did. After I perform a wake or a funeral, I don't just up and leave, like many priests do. Instead, I take off my *kesa*. I revert to "human mode" (*ningen mōdo*). I walk around the room, and I talk to the people there. Even people who have never been to a funeral know this is a rare thing. People who, for whatever reason, would ordinarily not talk to a priest are the ones who most appreciate the effort. People who meet me say 'there's a priest who cares about his *danka*! I want to go to *him* for my funeral.' And so they join my temple, transferring their family's membership from their old *bodaiji* to my temple."

Yamadera-rōshi asked me if I understand. I nod, and he continued.

"To stare at death means to care for people in this moment."

Yamadera-rōshi traced a Venn diagram of two interlocking circles on the floor with the tip of his *kyōsaku*. "Mrs. Terasawa was very special to you. You and the people

who are important to you are separate, but you share a human connection." He pointed to the center, where the circles overlap. "When a person dies, it leaves an emptiness that will be filled with tears. It would be wrong if it didn't."

He smiled. "I sometimes wonder how many people will cry at my funeral. Actually, I think about it quite a bit. And, you know, I hope there are a lot! If there are, it will mean I've touched the lives of a lot of people. I'm sixty-three years old now. My mother is in her nineties, but I don't know if I'll live ten, twenty, or thirty more years. All I know is that I have that time to make as many connections with people as I can.

"There is a saying, *Omoide sezu ni, wasurezu ni* – 'without remembering, without forgetting.' We must never forget those people we have lost, but we can't hold on to our grief to the point where we can no longer live. We all have responsibilities, and we can't neglect them out of grief.

"It is perfectly normal to cry at a funeral. Japanese people don't always show their emotion, thinking that they need to endure (*ganbaru*). We also have difficulty expressing anger in appropriate situations. There is a feeling of frustration all around. I think it would be better if people learned to manage their emotions better, and not be afraid to express them.

"This is why we encourage everyone to practice *kuyō*. When we act on behalf of people who were important to us, without thinking of ourselves, gradually our sadness becomes gratitude for those we were fortunate to meet in this life. At first it is difficult, but the more you do it, the more natural it becomes.

"Mrs. Terasawa may not have been your real grandmother, but she cared for you, and you cared for her. She became your grandmother, and you became her grandson.

When you prepare to sit zazen, or sing *goeika* or even when you make dinner or wash dishes, think of her. When you think of her, be thankful that of all the billions of people in the world, you and she had the chance to meet. This is all that is needed for you to do *kuyō*."

With that, he smiled and apologized for having to cut our meeting short. There were lots of unsui who were waiting to ask him their own questions, and he was determined to answer all of them, even if it took him all night.

"Human Mode"

Yamadera-rōshi's words in his sermon and in our meeting made it clear to me that *kuyō*, like *shugyō*, is a long, often painful, but ultimately personally transformative process for the living. The close parallels between *kuyō* and *shugyō* suggest that the two operate from an identical logic, and are in fact manifestations of the same process

As gentle as the clergy would like to make it sound, *kuyō* demands that the living submit to a process of emotional, mental, and physical redisciplining over a period of years. Like *shugyō*, one begins on the path of *kuyō* with reluctance and great sacrifice: it requires a death, both social and literal. From this departure, one is forced to renegotiate previously lived patterns of social relatedness, and relearn to interact with social beings not as they were (or as you imagined them to be), but as they *are*.

In this regard, the elements of *kuyō* – the *tsuya*, funeral, and mourning obligations – mimic the initiation processes that an unsui faces upon entrance to his training. That *kuyō* does so for the deceased (who has been tonsured) is expected; however, that it does

so for the living as well is a significant parallel that has not previously been observed. Like unsui, the living are taught the kinesthetic vocabulary of discipline that are familiar parts of monastic life: sitting for long periods in *seiza*, holding one's hands in *gasshō*, an sense of hierarchy and respect, an understanding and ability to navigate ritual space, among other things.

But most significantly, like *shugyō*, the goal of *kuyō* is *kuyō* itself: even a moment in which a person experiences a sense of gratitude for the dead and for the living and acts accordingly is a moment in which one participates in an ideal state of grace. The real transformation comes when a person is able to extend these moments for longer periods of time, and in different social contexts. A cup of tea placed at the family butsudan, may become a surprise gift of cookies brought to friends, eventually leading to a desire to help in need who cannot help themselves.

As the Buddha taught, the one universal in life is impermanence. No human that has ever lived is spared the pain of loss, and it is only in this pain that the wisdom of *kuyō* – and true gratitude for the living – can be truly appreciated. The mind and body that has been trained to deeply understand the impermanence of life (*mujō*) and selflessness (*muga*) is a "living *hotoke*", living in a state of enlightenment no different from one who has achieved *satori* through meditative practice.

Having undergone *shugyō*, the elder clergy hope that the younger clergy will be more understanding of the disciplining process of *kuyō* and be uniquely qualified to help the laity through it. The problem, as Yamadera, Kodama, and Kawase commented to me individually, is that the unsui, being young, simply do not yet have the life experiences necessary to have learned this important lesson. As teachers, this is something with which

the older priests have largely come to terms. While this frustrated Kodama, I believe that this understanding was what lay behind Kawase's smile during the Bon dance at Sōjiji, behind Mrs. Inamura's lesson in song, and behind what Yamadera was telling me now. One day, the unsui would come to understand the teaching of impermanence, and it is only from this understanding that springs the wisdom and compassion to effectively minister to their parishioners.

Complicating this, however, has been the encroachment of the funerary industry on what has previously been Buddhist territory. Increasingly, the mourning process has been made to be a commodity to be purchased more or less *a la carte*. Indeed, the entire process may be abandoned out of disinterest, or because it costs too much. Rather than being meaningful, the clergy laments that the transforming and necessary process of *kuyō* has been displaced by a veneer of commercialization and the illusion that proper care of the ancestors is something that discerning customers can choose.

In order to stay competitive in the widening field of Japanese religions, the unsui – as future Sōtō Zen priests – must learn to embrace change. Learning to face death is of course a part of this, but the priests must also learn to navigate a dynamic relationship with the public in which traditional Buddhist practices are subjected to market forces. For the time being, *kuyō* remains the primary means by which the laity and the clergy relate to and interact with one another. Moving forward, the real challenge for the Sōtō Zen clergy will be how to convey a sense of the lasting importance of *kuyō*, branded as a uniquely Sōtō Zen practice, to a laity whose religious loyalties are increasingly uncertain.

Chapter VII

Conclusion

"What Kind of Person Will I Become?"

In the preceding pages, I have shown how Daihonzan Sōjiji is a site at which both the living and the dead are cultivated and disciplined through the practice of *shugyō*. As a cultural practice, *shugyō* is a mechanism that enables people to create new social identities for themselves in the face of major life transformations. Consciously or unconsciously, the disciplining logic of *shugyō* leads many to seek out a Zen temple during times of both personal and social transition.

Of all of the sermons that I heard during my time in Japan, one line from one sermon still stands out to me as perfectly encapsulating my research at Sōjiji. Speaking about the need to incorporate *shugyō* into one's daily life, the priest looked out into the assembly of unsui and laypersons and challenged his audience to ask of themselves, "What kind of person will I become?"

We have seen that *shugyō* in a Sōtō Zen temple empowers participants to both reenact and participate in important moments of the sect's history through embodied practice. Sōtō Zen practice imparts a dialectical perspective on "history" that is simultaneously a linear story of one-off occurrences in the past, and a circular model for a

perpetually recurring present. *Shugyō*, as a disciplining apparatus, imprints a uniquely Sōtō Zen perspective of time and history onto the bodies of its practitioners through the use of what I have called a "kinesthetic vocabulary of discipline."

In so doing, *shugyō* provides an idealized model, a structured narrative, and a means of practice for participants to redefine their social realities. Indeed, through *shugyō*, practitioners are taught to imagine themselves as participants in an organic cosmology that allows individuals to embody ideals of harmony, grace and perfection. To say this process is "lifelong" is to see only half of the picture: *shugyō* is a process that begins in one life and continues well into the next. Moreover, it is a process of continuous becoming: *shugyō* never ends, but deepens. Diligent practice of *shugyō* enables individuals to work towards an idealized version of the world, and to continuously refine their understanding of their identity and place within it.

In this respect, the disciplinary forces of *shugyō* can best be seen in the context of practice within a group setting. In each of the preceding chapters, the temple groups discussed present carefully ordered microcosms of idealized social relationships. In the spaces that are created through the shared practice of *shugyō*, careful observation of hierarchy and synchronicity are essential tools through which disciplinary force is applied. Indeed, as we have seen, the discipline of *shugyō* is difficult to maintain in isolation. It is primarily through shared practice that a person is turned from an individual into a subject that embodies the social ideals of the group.

From a comparative religious perspective, *shugyō* is a fascinating cultural phenomenon because it is a conscious process of cultivation. Participants come to a temple for the express purpose of subjecting themselves to the physical, mental, and

emotional hardships of *shugyō*. Rather than being passive subjects, practitioners are instructed to be actively conscious of the disciplining processes to which they subjecting themselves. In the context of scholarly discourse on religions which is still dominated by tropes of "belief" and "faith," an emphasis on *shugyō* is a firm reminder of the need for scholars to attend to what religion *does*, and not merely what religion *says*.

Writing Sōjiji

The research for this dissertation began with a desire to focus on the part that religious tourism, both domestic and international, plays in shaping everyday life at Sōjiji. Within weeks of arriving in Japan to do my fieldwork, it became clear to me that the temple's primary interest is not in courting or catering to tourists in the way that other temples of comparable size and stature are accustomed. While Sōjiji does receive a great deal of religious tourism over the course of a given year, as a working parishioner temple, a training space for novice priests, and an administrative center Sōjiji's relationship with the public is markedly, and perhaps decidedly, different than other large temples throughout Japan.

Seeing Sōjiji in this light opened up far more lucrative avenues of inquiry than did limiting my focus to tourism alone. In the short term, however, this shift away from tourism was paralyzing, in an ethnographic sense. The enormity of Sōjiji can only really be described in superlative terms: in terms of land holdings and architectural size, Sōjiji ranks among the largest temples in Japan, boasting the largest Dharma Hall and some of the largest examples of Buddhist statuary. Similarly, Sōjiji's parishioner base of five

thousand families likewise distinguishes it from the vast majority of other Japanese Buddhist temples, nearly all of which have a parishioner membership that number in the low hundreds.

As I delved into Sōjiji's history in the pre-modern and modern periods, it was clear that in many ways Sōjiji outpaces nearly every other Japanese Buddhist institution in terms of its lasting cultural significance and influence on the historical development of Japanese religions, especially in regards to funerary and memorial ritual. Perhaps most significantly for the future is Sōjiji's role in the spread of Zen – both as a religious practice and as a commodity – to the world outside of Japan. Scratch the surface of an established Zen temple or informal zazen group in Paris, São Paolo, San Francisco, or indeed any other place, and you are likely to find a group with deep and significant historical ties to Sōjiji.

How, then, to capture the physical and cultural enormity of Sōjiji in a document constricted by time and page limits? For me, the first step was to recognize that there are stories, articles, and volumes about Sōjiji that extend infinitely beyond what I could expect to put into fewer than four hundred pages. Conceptually, this was the biggest struggle for me in conceiving this dissertation, and my fieldnotes demonstrate the struggles of a researcher consumed by capturing everything about Sōjiji, both historically and as it is lived today.

By my accounting, I was at Sōjiji for six days out of every seven for a period of over twenty months. In addition, I was a twenty-four hour "resident" of Sōjiji for over two months of accumulated time through many overnight stays and retreat periods. Further, I became a member of every temple organization that I was eligible to join,

participated in every retreat period open to the public, helped with the daily temple work, and sat in as an observer on nearly every temple ceremony that took place during that period. Admittedly, this pace was less ambition as it was a manifestation of an ethnographer's anxiety to find that magic "IT" (as if such a thing actually exists!) that might provide the key to unlocking and understanding the secrets of one's field site. Ultimately, the pace was also untenable, and my struggles to contain Sōjiji's enormity led to the increasing weight of unrealistic pressure of being "only" one person, with a limited supply of energy, time, and money.

Ultimately, however, this struggle to describe the inner workings of Sōjiji – a machine-like apparatus that is both complex and perpetually in motion – was mentally productive. A slow process of "false starts" culminated in my developing a personal narrative style that foregrounded human practice to define the architectural, ritual, and experiential spaces and contours of the temple. To tell Sōjiji's story, I chose to follow the movements and actions of different groups of people that followed their own trajectory through the temple's landscape. While these trajectories would intersect at various key junctures – public ceremonies, sermons, funerals, and the like – the intention was to demonstrate how each group's experience of *shugyō* differed in outward practice while purporting to hold the same religious ideal. As before, time and page limits led to difficult choices of which groups' experiences to include, and which voices had to be placed in background, muted but not forgotten.

As an author, I have gone to great lengths to portray life at Sōjiji as honestly and as transparently as the process of writing ethnography allows. Still, from an authorial standpoint, these choices and moments of discovery led to concerns over subjectivity: to

what degree have I portrayed Sōjiji "as it really is," versus Sōjiji simply as I experienced it? Would my informants recognize themselves in my retelling of their stories and lives? Would other scholars' experiences support or contradict my treatment of daily life at Sōjiji? There are no easy answers to these questions, and indeed, such insecurities lie at the core of the ethnographic endeavor. I acknowledge that other works on Sōjiji or any other Japanese religious institution will – and indeed, should – look very different than this one. Sōjiji's story began long before the ethnographer arrived, and will continue long after the ethnographer leaves. This work is only one of many possible stories.

Towards the Future

Considerations of time and space limited the scope of this work to Sōjiji itself, painting a picture of the temple and its practice in artificial isolation. Future projects will address Sōjiji's role in the complex corporate structure of the Sōtō Zen sect, especially in regards to its contemporary role as *honzan* alongside its long-time rival Eiheiji. Similarly, future investigations should address Sōjiji's role as a flagship institution of the Sōtō Zen sect: to what degree do the lessons taught to the novice priests carry over to Sōtō Zen's network of individually-operated branch temples? To what degree do "official" teachings get transmitted to a branch temple's parishioners and practitioners? How does creativity and innovation by individual priests and the variety of local practices influence the political and doctrinal direction of the *honzan*, and the Sōtō Zen sect as a whole?

Other questions in need of further inquiry are similarly comparative. How does the religious community of Sōjiji compare with similarly-sized religious communities

throughout the world? While a comparison with other religions' administrative centers would be directly analogous, Sōjiji has much to add to comparative discussions of spaces of mass religious praxis such as pilgrimage sites, modern large-scale religious communities, and even virtual (online) religious communities.

Further, Sōjiji must be viewed in the context of the globalization and commoditization of Zen as both a religious movement and a marketable commodity. International interest in Zen still brings hundreds of non-Japanese visitors to Sōjiji every year. Likewise, Sōjiji still has an active ideological presence in many of the Sōtō Zen sect's overseas missions and affiliated temples. Future research might address Sōjiji as a site in which global forces interact with one another to influence practice at the local level.

Another limitation of field research is that even if care is taken to draw ethnographic data from the broadest spectrum of a community, the researcher is ultimately left with a biased sample. In my daily visits to Sōjiji, I had sustained access primarily to those who not only found the motivation to stay, but who cared to share their experiences with me. My questions are the same as many of the clergy: how many more came to Sōjiji hoping to find something and were left wanting? What were they looking for such that Sōjiji did not deliver?

As Sōjiji approaches the celebration of its centennial anniversary in Tsurumi in 2011 and the seven hundredth anniversary of its founding in 2021, describing the temple as a "forest for a thousand years" is less a felicitous turn of phrase than it is an apt descriptor. From its founding in the medieval period, Sōjiji's cultural presence and impact can be felt across centuries of Japanese history. As has been discussed previously,

Sōjiji's administrators have proven uncannily dexterous at navigating the temple through difficulty and catastrophe, especially in the modern period.

The most pressing moment in recent memory has been the aftermath of the March 11, 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and resulting nuclear meltdown that devastated the northeast coast of Japan. In the wake of the disaster, Sōtō Zen clergy throughout Japan have thrown themselves into the Herculean task of ministering to the physical and religious needs of the survivors. Sōjiji weathered the powerful earthquake with only minor structural damage to the Daisodō and Butsuden. In contrast, many of the most active priests are those who lost their own temples and communities in the catastrophe.

In the months between the disaster and this writing, the response from the Sōtō Zen clergy – and of the clergy of the Japanese Buddhist sects, generally – has overwhelmingly been of one of sacrifice, charity, and selfless compassion. Reports and images of Buddhist priests organizing food drives and clean-up efforts in the affected areas, as well as performing funerals and memorial services free of charge have been commonplace in the national and international media. Indeed, one wonders if the increased media attention being paid to the relief efforts of exemplary and heroic clergy is a result of the images standing in stark contrast to Japanese popular notions of a parasitic Buddhist clergy who, as the proverb goes, "always profits."

It should be noted that the official response of Sōjiji's administration to the disaster was limited to a public statement of sympathy for the victims and the collection of monetary donations to assist humanitarian relief efforts. With the Sōtō Zen sectarian administration having a number of official ancillary and volunteer organizations that it can mobilize, it may not have been Sōjiji's place to act as a leader in the wake of the

disaster. Indeed, neither Sōjiji nor Eiheiji led the relief efforts; the two *honzan* acted together under the auspices of the Sōtō Zen central administration. In so doing, the Sōtō Zen sect broadcast a powerful message of unity in adversity, a message amplified by its working with the other Japanese Buddhist sects on behalf of those in need of relief.

Future ethnographic research on religion in Japan will likely recognize "3/11" (as the disaster has come to be known) as a watershed moment for Japanese Buddhism. While it is difficult to predict the long term effects of the 3/11 disaster on religiosity in Japan, in the short term, the ecumenical cooperation among the Japanese religions is demonstrating that sectarian issues are taking a back seat to the recognized need for priests to interact with the laity in "human mode." How this rehabilitation of the image of the Buddhist clergy will affect religious participation at the sectarian level or individual temple level has yet to be seen.

Similarly, future research should attend to the effects of the 3/11 disaster on the education of new generations of Buddhist clergy, especially to changes in ritual or ideology at the practical level. In a century that has already seen a dramatic about-face from traditional expectations that the laity provide material support the clergy, it is quite conceivable that a dedication to charity and humanitarian works will become the new face of Sōtō Zen *shugyō* in the next century.

Epilogue: In Perpetuity

It was lunchtime on a humid day in June when Mr. Kobota, the Baikakō assistant group leader, kneeled in the middle of the rehearsal space to address the group. Wearing

a blazer and slacks, Mr. Kubota was sweating in the summer heat, occasionally dabbing at his bald forehead with a handkerchief. His quiet voice barely pierced the din of the room, and Mr. Kubota had to start his speech several times before he was able to get the group's attention.

Mr. Kubota explained that he was addressing the group on behalf of Yamazaki-sensei, the Baikakō instructor. Yamazaki-sensei's home temple was in need of substantial renovations. In particular, the three-hundred year-old roof of the main hall was badly in need of repair. While long lasting, the large gabled roofs of Japanese temple architecture are expensive to repair and maintain, and there was no way that the small parish temple could pay for the repairs on its own. A common practice for temples in need of repairs is to host a fundraiser whereby people or groups can sponsor the donation of materials.

The Baikakō unanimously agreed to participate in the fundraiser for Yamazaki-sensei's temple. Further, it was decided that individual donations should be made, rather than a single group donation. It was agreed that each person in the group would donate 2,000 yen to sponsor their own individual roof tile. To ensure equality and fairness within the group, no-one was allowed to donate more, but neither was anyone allowed to donate less.

Mrs. Terasawa pulled out a roster of current Baikakō members from her bag. One by one, each member went up to Mrs. Terasawa and gave her their donation. Mrs. Terasawa checked their name off the list, and wrote down their wish. Most of the members chose "safety of the household" (*kanai anzen*), but several opted for "bodily health" (*shintai kenkō*).

After all of the names and donations had been gathered, Mr. Kubota ceremoniously handed Yamazaki-sensei the manila folder on behalf of the Baikakō. In addition to a list of names and wishes, the envelope now contained close to 60,000 yen, about five hundred dollars. Yamazaki-sensei received the donation graciously, humbly thanking the Baikakō for their contribution. One of the women in the group responded to Yamazaki-sensei's gratitude with the formal expression, "Your thanks are enough" (*Okimochi dake desu*). Mrs. Terasawa quickly corrected her: "His thanks *aren't* enough. We're asking him for a favor!" (*'Okimochi dake' ja nai. Onegai suru koto da yo*).

Later, I asked Mrs. Terasawa what she meant by "asking for a favor." She explained to me that our names and requests will be painted onto the underside of the individual roof tiles we donated, where they will be protected from the elements. Every time the hall is used for *shugyō* – for ceremonies, or for a funeral, or for zazen, or even when it is cleaned – the good merit generated by the activity will rise like incense smoke and work to make our wishes come true.

"When the roof was built, people wrote their names on the tiles just like we're doing. Right now, they're removing the old tiles, and finding the names of people who lived three hundred years ago. These people have been dead for many years, but their names and wishes are still there.

"Three hundred years from now, when the roof is rebuilt again, they will turn over the tiles and see our names," Mrs. Terasawa said. "We'll be long gone, but our names will be preserved forever. Maybe someone will pick up a tile and think, 'what kind of a person was this?' Isn't that amazing?"

Appendix A

Photographs

Figure 1. Families Picnicking in Sōjiji's Garden



Figure 2. Sōjiji in 1912

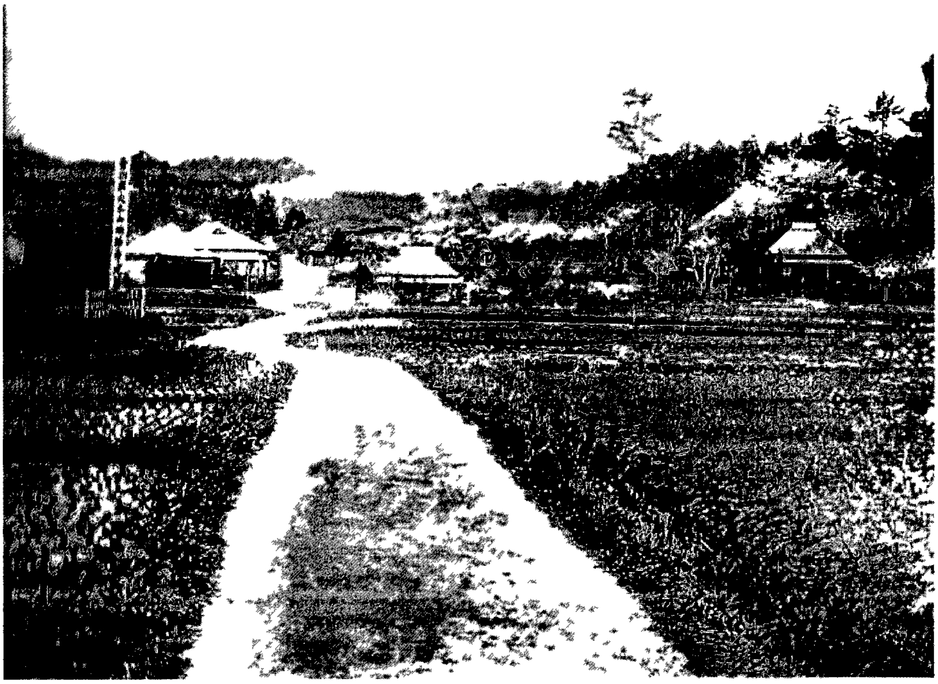


Figure 3. Daisodō in Springtime



Figure 4. Ceremony in the Butsuden



Figure 5. Unsui on Stage

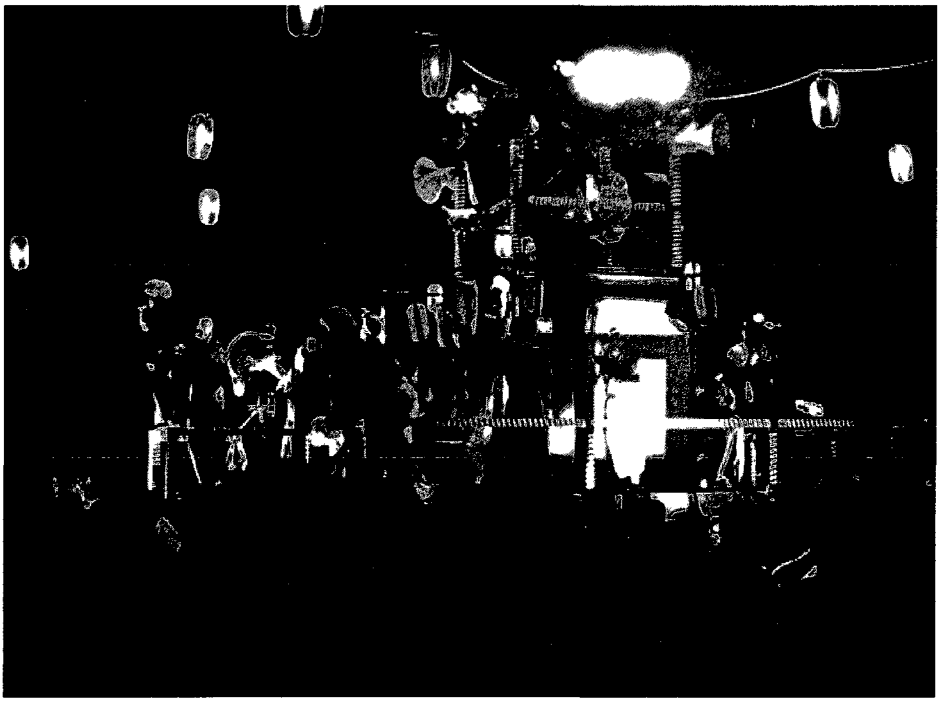


Figure 6 Leaving Sōjiji



Figure 7 Bells and Songbook for Goeika

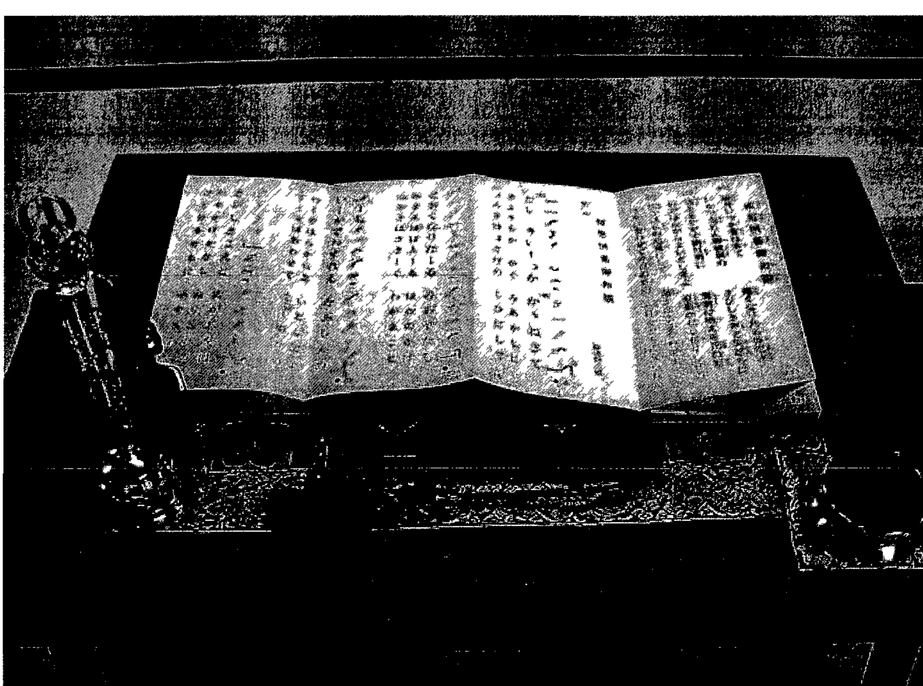
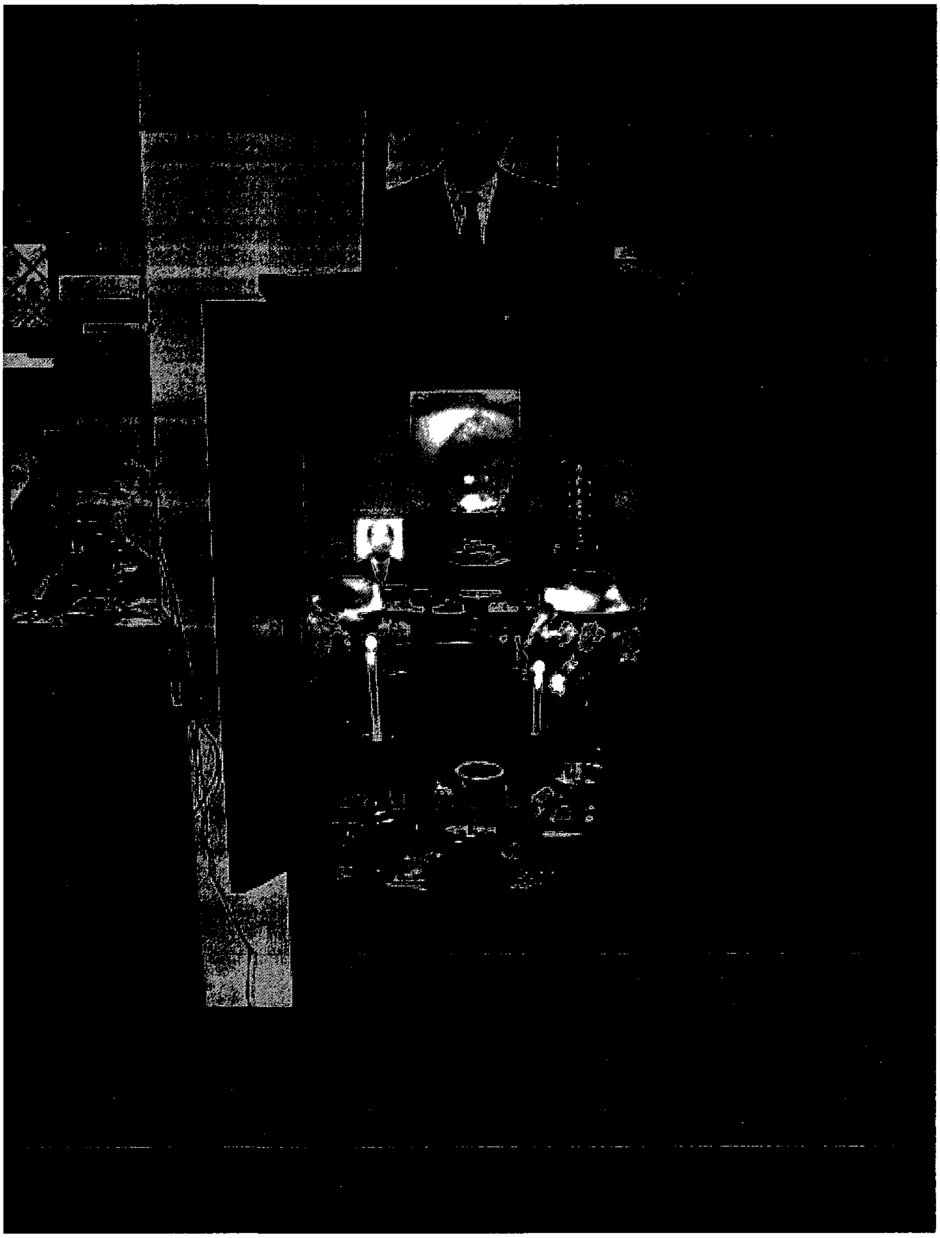


Figure 8. Butsudan in a Sōtō Zen Parishioner's Home



Appendix B

Character Glossary

ango	安居
anmyō	安名
asan	下山
Asano Sōichirō	浅野總一郎
baika	梅花
Baikakō	梅花講
bodaiji	菩提寺
"*bunri dokuritsu*"	分離独立
busshin	仏心
butsudan	仏壇
Butsuden	仏殿
Chōryū-shitsu	跳龍室
Daijōji	大乗寺
Daisodō	大祖堂
danka seido	檀家制度
den'e	伝依
Denkōroku	伝光録
denpō	伝法
Dentō Fugin	伝燈諷經
deshi	弟子
darani	陀羅尼
dōangosha	同安居者
Dōgen Kigen	道元希玄
dōgyō	同行
Eidai Gōsō Haka	永代合葬墓
Eiheiji	永平寺
ekōmon	回向文
fuda	札
Fujinkai	婦人会
Fukan Zazengi	普勧坐禅儀
fuku-jūshoku	副住職
fuku-kanshu	副貫首
fukusa	袱紗
Fukyō	布教
"*furyō bōzu*"	不良坊主
fushi	不思
Fūsu	副寺
garan	伽藍
gaitan	外端
Gasan-ha	峨山派
Gasan Jōseki	峨山韶碩
gasshō	合掌
genze riyaku	現世利益
Godō	後堂
goeika	御詠歌
gowasan	御和讃
hanami	花見
hankafuza	半跏趺坐
Hatsumōde	初詣
hattō	法堂
Higan	彼岸
hishi	非思
hōgu	法具
hōkei	法系
hōkka join	法界定印
hōkō bosatsu	放光菩薩
Hōkōdō	放光堂
hōmyō	法名
hondō	本堂
honkakuteki	本格的

honzan	本山
hōon	報恩
hossenshiki	法戦式
hotoke	仏 (or 佛)
"*hotoke ni naru*"	仏に成る
"*hotoke no michi*"	仏の道
hōwa	法話
"*ichibutsu ryōso*"	一仏両祖
"*ichinichi jūshoku*"	一日住職
iei	遺影
ihai	位牌
ikibotoke	生き仏
indō hōgō	引導法号
Ino	維那
inshō	印證
Ishikawa Sōdō	石川素童
"*isu seikatsu*"	椅子生活
jikidō	直堂
Jishin	待眞
Jizō	地蔵
jizoku	寺族
jōbutsu	成仏
jōdo	浄土
jōen	牀
Jōganji	成願寺
jōzan	上山
jōza	上座
jukaie	授戒会
jūshoku	住職
juzu	数珠
Kaigen Kuyō	開眼供養
kaimyō	戒名
"*kanai anzen*"	家内安全
Kandoku-ryō	看讀寮
Kannon	観音
Kannin	監院
Kanshu	貫首
kayu	粥
kechimyaku	血脈
keiko	稽古
Keizan Jōkin	瑩山紹瑾

Keizan Shingi	瑩山清規
kekkafuza	結跏趺坐
kenshū	研修
kesa	袈裟
kinhin	経行
kitōji	祈祷寺
kō	講
kōan	公案
kōchō	講長
kōhai	後輩
"*kokusai zen'en*"	国際禅苑
"*kokyō shōshin*"	古教照心
kōso	高祖
"*kōun ryūsui*"	行雲流水
kuin	庫院
kuyō	供養
kyōsaku	警策
kyōten (as "bible")	教典
kyōten (for chanting)	経典
Monju	文殊
matsuji	末寺
Meihō Sotetsu	明峰素哲
meinichi	命日
menkata shiki	掛搭式
Mitama Matsuri	御霊祭り
mokusō	黙想
mondō	問答
moppan	木版
Morooka	諸岡
mōshigo	申し子
mochū	喪中
moshu	喪主
muenbotoke	無縁仏
muga	無我
mujō	無常
mushin	無心
naitan	内端
nakama ishiki	仲間意識
nehankin	涅槃金
nenju	念誦
nesshin	熱心

Nichiyō Sanzenkai	日曜参禅会	"*senzo daidai*"	先祖代々
"*nikujiki saitai*"	肉食妻帯	sesshin	攝心
"*ningen mōdo*"	人間モード	Shakai Jigyō	社会事業
Ni-Ō	仁王	shashu	叉手
nyoi	如意	shichidō garan	七堂伽藍
nyūdō shiki	入堂式	shikantaza	只管打坐
nyūkaisha	入会者	shikijō	式場
Obon	お盆	shinmō	新亡
ohakamairi	お墓参り	shinrei	振鈴
on	恩	"*shintai kenkō*"	身体健康
onki	遠忌	shinto	信徒
osonae	お供え	shintō	新倒
oshō	和尚	shippei	竹篦
pokkuri dera	ぽっくり寺	shisō	師僧
rakusu	輅子	Shissui	直歳
rei	鈴	Shiuntai	紫雲台
rinjūsei	輪住制	shō	鉦
Rokuji	録事	shōbō	正法
rōshi	老師	*Shōbōgenzō*	正法眼蔵
"*ryōzan ittai funi*"	両山一体不二	Shōgakusan Sōjiji	諸岡山總持寺
saidan	祭壇	shōjin ryori	精進慮利
samu	作務	Shōunkaku	祥雲閣
samue	作務衣	shugyō	修行
sandō	参道	shugyō dōjō	修行道場
sange	散華	shukke tokudo	出家得度
sanmon	山門	shumidan	須弥壇
sanpai	参拝	shumoku	撞木
Sanshōkaku	三松閣	Shuryō	衆寮
sanzen	参禅	"*shushō ittō*"	修証一等
satori	悟り	*Shushōgi*	修証記
seibu	西部	Shuso	首座
seichū	制中	sōan	送安
seishin antei	精神安定	sōdō	僧堂
seiyōka	西洋化	sōgi	葬儀
seiza	正座	Sōjiji	總持寺
sekizaiten	石材店	sōrin	僧林
Sejiki-e	施食会	sōryo	僧侶
Senbutsujō	選佛場	sōseki	僧籍
Sennen no Mori	千年の森	sōshiki	葬式
senpai	先輩	Taihōkan	待鳳官
senzo kuyō	先祖供養	taiso	太祖

tanagyō	棚經
Tanga-ryō	旦過寮
Tantō	単頭
teishō	提唱
teishatsu	剃髪
tengoku	天国
tenshō	転生
Tenzo	典座
Tenzo Kyōkun	典座教訓
Tettsu Gikai	徹通義介
tōbu	東部
Tōkokki	洞谷記
Tsuizen Kuyō	追善供養
Tsuru-ga-oka	鶴ヶ丘
tsuya	通夜
tsuyū	梅雨
tōsu	東司
Undō	雲堂
unsui	雲水
waraji	草鞋
warakusu	輪軺子
Yakushi Nyorai	薬師如来
Yōkōji	永光寺
yokusu	浴司
zafu	坐蒲
zagen	坐元
zaike	在家
zazen	坐禅
Zazen Yōjinki	坐禅用心記
zen'en	禅園
zenji	禅師
Zuise Haitō	瑞世拝堂

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